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## The Times Literary Supplement

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Cover picture

A gospel singer, one of the photographs contributed by Jerry Wilson to Marguerite Yourcenar's *Blues et Gospels* (57pp, plus 116pp of plates, Paris: Gallimard, 207 011077 X); the book contains the texts of songs translated by Mme Yourcenar, and a brief introduction, recalling her encounters with and absorption in Black life and music. Her novel *Alexis* is reviewed on page 1392.

## The great chameleon

John Summerson

TERRY FRIEDMAN  
James Gibbs  
362pp, Yale University Press, for the Paul Mellon Center for Studies in British Art. £40. 0300031726

Now there has been only one book on James Gibbs, written by Brian Little to celebrate the bicentenary of the architect's death, which it missed by a year, coming out in 1955. It was an octavo of 310 pages with thirty plates. Now, thirty years later, comes Terry Friedman with a work of larger format, much longer text, 331 colour and black-and-white plates and a substantially annotated catalogue of authenticated works. It would be easy to say that Friedman now supersedes Little, but this is not the case. He does so in bulk, intensity of research on minor works and wealth of illustration but not always in perception or elegance of exposition. Little's book, with its strong feeling for the social and political history of the period, retains its value. What can reasonably be asserted is that we now have two books, very different in kind, which together, allowing for pluses and minuses all round, provide the world with a satisfactory case-history of the architect of St Martin-in-the-Fields.

The text of Friedman's book consists of eleven chapters. The first is a compressed account of Gibbs's career, the second of his mode of life, professional practice and source material. Then follow chapters on churches, church monuments, country houses, London houses and public buildings, and works in Oxford and Cambridge. A concluding chapter describes Gibbs's books and some of the buildings deriving from them in England, America and elsewhere. The catalogue, arranged alphabetically under counties, summarizes the sources of evidence on the origin and realization of each building scheme.

The biographical chapter covers the same ground, and necessarily uses the same sources, as Little. Gibbs was the son of a respectable merchant, his mother "a gentlewoman of a good family". He left Aberdeen when he had come of age, visited an aunt in Holland and then wandered, by way of Paris and Vienna, to Italy, landing up in Rome where his immediate purpose was to enter the Scots College and be trained as a missionary priest. He did enter the college but had a rough time and soon quit. As an alternative to the priesthood he thought first

of painting, but architecture prevailed and he entered the studio of Rome's top architect, Carlo Fontana. He returned to England in 1708 and, with the help of the Earl of Mar and Sir Christopher Wren, obtained a post as surveyor to the Commissioners for Building Fifty New Churches. In that capacity he built one church, St Mary-le-Strand. After that he never looked back. Prosperous, social and unmarried, he moved in the same civilizing circle as Pope and Prior, with Dahl, Wootton, Bridgman and Rysbrack as comrade artists in the service of Edward Harley. He died in London in 1754, aged seventy-one.

He died a Catholic, and an odd thing about Friedman's narrative is the absence of any allusion to one of the most striking facts established by Little, namely that Gibbs, having concealed his religious loyalties from the world for forty years, made provision at the eleventh hour for the security of his soul by providing in his will for the saying of post-obituary masses. A published fact with so much bearing on the biographical image needs either confirmation or contradiction but Friedman gives neither. It seems that he has been betrayed by a grossly negligent transcription of the will and it is necessary to assert here that Little's account of it is correct and his summing-up is therefore plausible: "It seems from what we know of his prosperous days that Gibbs long found the burden of open Catholicism, or even crypto-Catholicism too much to bear and far too much of an impediment to his ambition and his fondness for worldly comfort."

Of the ensuing chapters of the book, those on the churches and on the Radcliffe library at Oxford have a special importance because it was in these that Gibbs was most original and most challenging. They also present the historian with some intriguing problems of style. The first church, St Mary-le-Strand, was begun in 1714 and consecrated in 1724. Emerging in the present year from the restorer's scaffold it looks as fresh as it must have done 268 years ago, when the Earl of Mar described it (before seeing it) as "the most complete little damsel in town". "Complete", as it happens is just the word for this rather narrow single-cell building with its eloquent correspondence of two sparingly enriched orders without and two, slightly varied, within; a chancel arch framed by an architectural trace of the west front; and an apse which finds its counterpart in the semi-circular porch at the west end. The surprising thing is the deliberate complexity of the modelling, something altogether alien to London.

The long sides of the church are of five bays, plus a narrower slice of wall at each end. Each of the five bays has a window above and a niche below, all identical, but the first, third and fifth bays have columns and pediments framing them. The wall face is an ambiguous affair, rusticated in shallow recessed panels between the columns which stand against plain ashlar. The effect is Mannerist, rather than Baroque, and is not easily paralleled in Rome. The late Arnold Noach drew attention to one demonstrable Roman influence - Andrea Pozzo's *Perspectiva Pictorum et Architectorum*, a work which, as Friedman shows later in the book, inspired Gibbs elsewhere. But in St Mary-le-Strand much remains to be accounted for. The interior, covered with a richly coffered plaster ceiling of a Roman type, just curved enough to be called a vault, is less of a tease and justifies the late poet laureate's exclamation - "a Baroque Paradise".

In 1716 Gibbs's Tory affiliations lost him his surveyorship but he pleaded to be allowed to finish St Mary's in his own way, "since I have carried it up so far to the entire satisfaction of everybody". The plea was accepted but the "entire satisfaction" was not as universal as Gibbs implied. The poor little building was loaded with abuse by the Palladian faction and was held up as a specimen of "bad" architecture even by Sir John Soane.

Gibbs was not in a position to let mere matters of style interfere with a promising career and when, in 1720, the commission for St Martin-in-the-Fields came into his hands he took a very different line. He submitted several designs to the commissioners responsible for the building, including one in the form of a great rotunda, with an attached portico as at the Roman Pantheon. Friedman sees Wren's 'Great Model for St Paul's' as a near-contemporary prototype but it is worth noting that Gibbs's beloved Pozzo gives a plan for a circular church among his perspective studies. The design proved too expensive, besides being too big for the site, but it was a seminal creation and in his last chapter Friedman lists the circular and oval churches of the eighteenth century which manifestly derive from it.

The alternative was, of course, a rectangular plan on the model of a Roman temple. To marry a Roman temple to a Baroque temple is as indecent as it is difficult and St Martin's soon relinquished the conventional temple form, the portico becoming a more or less detachable frontispiece with strips of wall to left and right of it. Moreover Gibbs modified his side eleva-

tions by introducing recessed columns in the end bays of the sides, the westward bays having the effect of acknowledging the powerful thrust of the steeple (the same thing happens in the eastward bays to mark the logic of the chancel).

The interior is a triumph. Friedman sees it as "a church within a church" and so it is. It is a Wren church developed a stage or two beyond anything Wren did in the City. Wren never dared to separate nave and aisles by giant single columns; the nearest he got was with the twinned giants at St Bride's. Another thing Wren never did was to top a column with a "dosseret" entablature. This is a strange device - at once pedantic and theatrical: pedantic if we consider it as the application of a Vitruvian dogma and theatrical if we simply enjoy the vertiginous thrill of the whole contrivance. Where did Gibbs get this idea? Brunelleschi used such entablatures at S Lorenzo and S Spirito, Florence. But in the 300-year interval between these churches and St Martin's "dosseret" entablatures are rarely found. Pozzo does indeed give us a beautiful drawing of a single specimen but simply as a study in perspective. One wishes that Friedman had pressed his research a little further in this curious matter.

Then there is the steeple. This again is a development from Wren, though Friedman would persuade us that the younger Antonio da Sangallo's tower at Montepulciano has something to do with it. Surely not. The bell stage is a clear imitation of St Mary-le-Bow and what rises above it is nearly all referable to that example. Wren's circular *templeto* is reassembled as an octagon, then comes a diminutive version of Wren's allusive ring of reversed consoles (commemorating the flying "bows" of the pre-fire church); the next stage in Wren's design is omitted but Gibbs finishes, as Wren does, with an obelisk. It is a highly skilled but perfectly comprehensible paraphrase of Wren's composition.

Friedman gives a chapter to Gibbs's church monuments, prefacing it with the dedicatory plate in Flamsteed's *Historia Caelestis* which Gibbs drew as early as 1712 and which is almost line for line a copy of one of Pozzo's altarpieces. The design is reflected in the Duke of Newcastle's huge monument in Westminster Abbey.

A great part of Gibbs's practice consisted in the building of country houses. Friedman sorts these into "early", "mature" and "late" periods. In the early period the so-called

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design for Dupplin Castle, Perthshire, must surely be written off as a mere copy of Boffrand's design for Malgrange. The design for a columnar screen for Sir William Wyndham at Witham, Somerset, and an elevation of the Duke of Chandos's house at Cannons, engraved while the house still stood in 1739, taken together, seem to indicate the quality of Gibbs's domestic style while he still thought in Roman Baroque terms - ie, before 1720. The screen at Witham was never built (it was left to Adam to do something on the same lines at Osterley); the façade of Cannons, presumably built, was demolished in 1747. Gibbs's work at Houghton and Wimpole does not compensate for the lack of really substantial original work of this interesting period.

With Ditchley, perhaps today Gibbs's best-known country house, we enter the "mature" period. The Baroque flavour has gone and the exterior of Ditchley might almost be mistaken for a house of the pre-Revolution years. "Convenience and simplicity" is now the theme and, for the interior, a "rich, though chaste, style". The saloon, however, has the uneasy air of wanting to be grander than its size allows and it foreshadows one of Gibbs's latest and grandest domestic works, the hall at Ragley (1750-54); where the space above the Corinthian order soars up to twice the order's height to meet the flat ceiling by way of a groined cove.

Gibbs was much concerned with the "villa" idea, his first enterprise in this kind being Sudbrook House, Petersham (1715-19), for the Duke of Argyll. He took the plan from Palladio's Villa Thiene and thus gave the house a 30-foot cubic central hall. This survives intact and points in the same direction as the Ditchley saloon - ie, towards Ragley. Whitton (1725-8), for the Duke's brother, the Earl of Islay, was another Middlesex "villa" and so of course was Pope's house at Twickenham (1719-20) about which, notwithstanding the fame of its builder, we know astonishingly little. In the same commuting area of the rich and noble, the "Frascati House" at Twickenham, Gibbs built for James Johnston the octagonal garden pavilion (1716-21) which has survived the destruction of Johnston's house and preserves its rich near-Rococo plaster ceiling, the work of Gibbs's favourite Italian, Artari and Bagutti. This little building comes into a chapter which the author has reserved for things of the kind - garden buildings, temples, ice-houses, a dovecote and, notably, Gibbs's contributions to the Stowe landscape: the Boycott Pavilions, the Palladian Bridge and the Gothic Temple of Liberty.

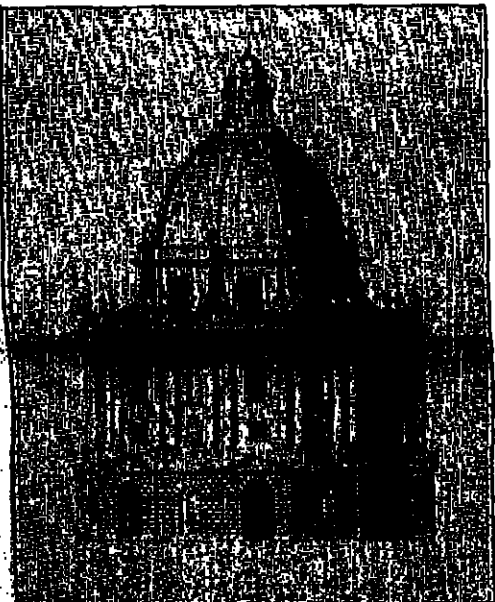
A chapter on London town houses deals with Gibbs's participation in Edward Harley's development of the family estate around Cavendish Square. Here, in Henrietta Street (now wholly rebuilt) Gibbs had his own residence and built, as an investment, two other houses of his own designing. A room from one of these is in the Victoria and Albert Museum. There is nothing else of his on the estate except, indeed, the "Oxford Chapel" (St Peter's, Vere Street), plain outside but a miniature St Martin's within, described in a previous chapter. An earlier and more important London connection was with Burlington House before it became an exclusively Palladian stronghold. The long-vanished quadrants of Doric columns linking the service blocks to the entrance are now generally ascribed to Gibbs; Friedman concurs and he has found a plausible prototype in the Hôtel de Sourve, Paris, built in 1667 and illustrated in Marot's *Recueil*, a copy of which Gibbs possessed. The columns there were in pairs, mounted on pedestals. Gibbs equalized the spacing and brought the columns down to a shallow-stepped platform, producing the convincing "Neo-classical" effect so much admired by the next generation. It can, however, be argued that the quadrants at Burlington House were inventions of those of Sir William Bruce at Hopetoun, which Gibbs would have known.

Churches apart, London today has little to show of Gibbs's work. His greatest metropolitan secular building is St Bartholomew's Hospital, begun in 1728 and completed long after the architect's death. Building hospitals in the eighteenth century meant not only charitable provision for the poor but valuable prestige for the not-so-poor. Services given free to such projects could earn dividends in goodwill and patronage, and Gibbs was characteristically prompt in offering his services at honorary

Bath seized the opportunity to advertise Bath stone in the metropolis by providing it on special terms; and Hogarth painted the walls of the great staircase for nothing. The administrative block and the three great ward-blocks still stand and are still in use for the purpose for which they were built. In quality of design and construction, and even to some extent of ornament, they are in no way inferior to the most lordly mansions of the time.

The penultimate chapter of the book concerns itself with Gibbs's work at Cambridge and Oxford. At Cambridge he was involved in two major projects, both begun on exceedingly grand lines and then, by force of circumstance, abbreviated. The Senate House was to have been one limb of a "Public Building" comprising three connected blocks forming a deep courtyard, open to the west. It was intended to accommodate a library and various administrative and ceremonial functions of the University. Friedman reproduces two versions of the project, both rather pedestrian. One suspects that Gibbs felt constrained to pander to the obsessions of James Burrough, the Cambridge amateur architectural enthusiast. Anyway, the scheme ran into difficulties and only the ceremonial Senate House was built. A dullish building, surely, but beautifully constructed of Portland stone and with severe but masterly detailing inside.

The Fellows' Building at King's College was, similarly, intended as part of a threefold com-



Two of James Gibbs's designs for the Radcliffe Library, Oxford, reproduced from the book reviewed here.

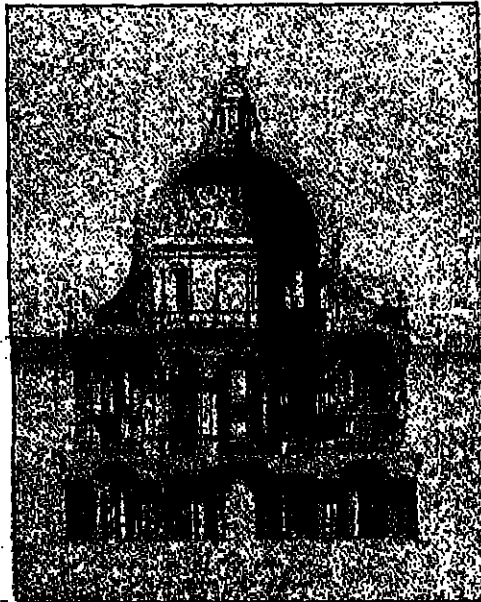
position. Hawksmoor offered a design but Gibbs's "handsome plain manner" was preferred. The west wing was built and handsome is the word. A similar block would have closed the courtyard towards Trumpington Street and between the two would have been more of the same thing but with a projecting portico facing the chapel. Fortunately, perhaps, the Fellows found themselves unable to proceed beyond the first block.

At Oxford, greater things were on the way. The building of a library with Dr John Radcliffe's bequest of £40,000 roused great expectations. Hawksmoor, already employed at All Souls, produced a design in the form of a domed rotunda, attached to the old Bodleian. However, the authorities obtained powers to purchase more land and Gibbs then came forward with several rectangular designs on the lines of Wren's library at Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1720, the burning of the South Sea Bubble set things back for fourteen years, at which time a new rotunda design of Hawksmoor's was under consideration. Hawksmoor, however, died in 1736. Gibbs took over.

We may suspect that Gibbs was not all that pleased to have his extremely elegant rectangular designs superseded by another man's cylindrical model - and one strongly associated with the mausoleum which that other man had been building at Castle Howard. However, the decision once made, Gibbs proceeded to handle the rotunda theme in his own way. It was a challenge and brought out a capacity for invention which had hardly been exercised since the days of St Mary-le-Strand. The wit and subtlety of the design are remarkable. In principle the building is a giant cylinder with an inner cylinder rising to a dome. But in fact the lower story is not a cylinder but a polyhedron with a series of alternate deep and shallow

neighbours by a slight projection and a pediment. Over each projecting ("strong") side rise two Corinthian columns, but each column has a twin which rises from an adjoining "weak" side. This injustice, however, is repaired because each "strong" side, with the bay above it, is "weakened" by the penetration of openings while the "weak" side and bay are solid. Above the balustrade eight buttresses emerge, expressing the eight piers of the internal cylinder. They fall on the centre lines of alternate solid bays and a delicate equilibrium has been achieved. It is a brilliant study in contradictions and ambiguities, played against the rhythmic implications of the cylinder; a sudden retrieval from the sixteenth century of the spirit of mannerism. As such it stands alone in the architecture of Britain and if Gibbs had built nothing else, the Radcliffe would qualify him as one of our great masters.

Dr Friedman has given us a book which provides nearly all the information available on the subject of James Gibbs, the result of formidable textual and documentary research over a long period. It is possible now to make a reasonable assessment of what the man achieved. Where style is concerned Gibbs was a chameleon architect. We see him starting his London career with Italian Baroque, shading into Mannerism, then shifting to Wren for churches and, for country houses, his own undogmatic versions of Palladianism; then, towards the end, becoming, for one occasion,



brilliantly Mannerist. That these stylistic manoeuvres have some correspondence with patronage and politics is obvious but we have nothing like enough detail to plot the connections. If we ask where was the "essential" Gibbs, there is no obvious answer. In every style he handled (excluding only the Gothic) his polished technique set him head and shoulders above his Palladian contemporaries. The school of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor he deliberately shunned. In general, he settled for a sensible (and sometimes, admittedly rather dull) compromise, with a few personal quirks.

Somewhere near the centre of the Gibbs story is the enigma of conscience. Gibbs wore a Protestant mask; to lower it would have been to sacrifice gainful employment and a government pension. Style had to be agreeable to the Protestant ethic. Wren was safely Protestant; so, by sheer force of Anglican adoption, was Palladio, Fontana and Pozzo were not, though so inalienable are the apprehensions of style that the Newcastle monument exploded harmlessly in Westminster Abbey. But what of the Radcliffe? Its general form has the sanction of antiquity, Bramante and Wren. The handling, as we have seen, is Mannerist; and there, perhaps, is an answer to our question about the "essential" Gibbs. There is nothing like the Radcliffe anywhere in European architecture; a belated Mannerist masterpiece by a Catholic Scot with a chronic sense of insecurity and more than a trace of inventive genius.

Gibbs was no leader; and there was no "school of Gibbs". Horace Walpole despised his work. And yet no architect before (or, indeed, after) the Adam brothers was so widely copied. His book of designs sped all over the English-speaking world and the progeny of Gibbs (not the same as a "school") is as the sands of the sea. But in the gallery of English architects he is one who can be said to have

## Suburbia in rure

Harry Gordon Slade

JOHN MARTIN ROBINSON  
The Latest Country Houses  
204pp. Bodley Head. £15.  
0307 305620

When John Martin Robinson tells us in his introduction that *The Latest Country Houses* follows in "an informal and general way" the work of the late Christopher Hussey he is being both disarming and wise. It may well be that there is a place for a serious study of the large houses built in the countryside since 1945 but that has still to be written. Mr Robinson's book is a trivial, anecdotal work that will undoubtedly be popular, and should quickly find a place beside the piles of old copies of *Country Life* which figure in so many of its colour and black-and-white illustrations.

The existence of the contemporary country house as opposed to the house in the country is open to question. To have any real validity a school or type of architecture needs to develop a genre or vocabulary which gives some clue to the function of the buildings and of the nature and taste of the patrons. Most of the houses discussed in this book have little in common other than that they are the homes of rich men who enjoy opulent clutter and are afraid of new ideas other than those of a technological nature: few of them would be out of place in Weybridge, Hampstead or Atlanta.

Robinson separates them into three groups: modern, restoration/reconstruction and pastiche. Of the first group, clearly Robinson's least favourite, the examples are, with one exception, depressingly dull. The exception is the Duke of Westminster's new Eaton Hall. This is successful, not because it is a real country house - which it is not - but because it has much more the appearance of a minor embassy: given the international dimension of the Grosvenor fortune this is not inappropriate.

The reconstruction school starts with the immense advantage of working on houses that have already been designed, and generally at a time when these matters were better understood. In the hands of an architect of the quality of Francis Johnson the results can be both effective and sensitive, as his work at Eveningham and Houghton shows. Badly done, however, the results can be disastrous and there can be nothing more tasteless than the paintings of the Temptation of Christ on the staircase ceiling at Ragley.

The author reserves his greatest praise for the school of pastiche. In the work of scholars like Sir Albert Richardson and his son-in-law, Eric Houfe, whose work was a conscious attempt to start again at the point where, after the death of Sir John Soane, the development of design had stopped, there was a possibility that tradition might reassert itself. But most of their contemporaries preferred to be eclectic and please their clients, and, with the exception of James Fletcher Watson's essays in eighteenth-century Norfolk vernacular, the results are disappointing. Perhaps the most dreary example is Knowsley, which has all the appearance of a temporary officers' mess designed for an unfashionable regiment by a more than usually parsimonious Ministry of Defence. Possibly the most architecturally dishonest houses are those of Quinlan Terry and the late Raymond Erith, which, with elegantly detailed sterility, adapt any fashion, from Palladio to Hollar, to the client's taste; lovers of the absurd will cherish Harry Graham's design for a house in Nigeria which has a nodding acquaintance with the Villa Trevissini.

A chapter title "Meds and baroque" is the too frequent use of "arguably" without any supporting argument, and quotations from such writers as James Lees-Milne, William Hitchcock and Jennifer's *Diary* must lessen the authority of the book. There are also errors; "Godfrey's" for "Godey's Lady's Book" and "Henry" for "Hector Corbitt" and, on the agonies of sexual initiation for unsuspecting girls; she mentioned the perils of childbirth and the difference in attitude to sex of men and of women; and tells of the ridicule attracted by those who too obviously married for money, such as the young Duke of St. Albans who

above all in any work dealing with buildings there is only one plan.

## Superior beings

Margaret FitzHerbert

ANGELA LAMBERT  
*Unquiet Souls: The Indian Summer of the British aristocracy, 1880-1918*  
262pp. Macmillan. £14.95.  
0333 347617

There was room for a book about the Souls. Apart from an unlearned coffee-table book published earlier this year, there has been little written about the group as a whole although there have been many biographies of its individual members. When one observes the undiminished industry in books about Bloomsbury it is surprising that publishers have not earlier thought of the possibilities offered by the Souls. They were, after all, better born, better looking, richer, more heterosexual, more influential in the affairs of the nation (one prime minister, another prime minister's wife, and a viceroys of India), and even sometimes cleverer than the Bloomsbury group. Yet they have been neglected. This book ends that neglect; at the same time it is unlikely to generate a surge of public interest.

Ambition in a book is often welcome; but the ambition of *Unquiet Souls* is reckless. Facing already the manifest difficulties of writing about a group, and a group that insisted on denying that it existed ("never can there have been people less desirous of forming a clique", said Etile Desborough; "to me the name of Souls seemed always meaningless and slightly ludicrous", wrote Arthur Balfour), the author has extended her examination to the next generation, the Coteries, and enlarged her scope to include the social and economic history of the period. Her research is excellent and her material dazzling but the result is disappointing.

Angela Lambert's approach, a mixture of awe, envy and disapproval, is unsuited to her task. She is continually lecturing her reader, drawing conclusions, often contentious, and making inferences, many banal, some plain silly. Nothing is left to the reader. And what a strange reader Lambert has in mind. It is improbable that a book about the Souls would appeal to people of particularly low intelligence yet Lambert treats her readers as idiots. Repetitions appear on almost every page. Not only are characters introduced again and again

with the same potted account of their blood or emotional relationships but we are repeatedly regaled with the same pieces of trivial information, for example that the Souls referred to their leather trunks as Noah's Arks.

One could perhaps forgive the repetitions if the author had spared us some of her comments. Scarcely a quotation can escape without a remark attached to its tail: "Plainly the glamorous and godlike Harry was not accustomed to having his wishes flouted!" As well as Harry Cust being "godlike and glamorous", Lady Randolph Churchill is "amouderingly lovely" and the Tennant sisters are "glittering, multi-coloured personalities". Throughout there is a liberal use of exclamation marks, a bad habit possibly caught from some of the female Souls.

There are also some odd gaps. A characteristic of the period, which most biographers treat with care but do not ignore, was the endless flow of antisemitic remarks and jokes. These were particularly prevalent among the Coteries. Lambert avoids the issue entirely and her reticence is most misleading. She introduces Edwin Montagu as the ideal suitor for Venetia Stanley: "He possessed almost every advantage. He was immensely rich; devoted to Venetia; moved in the highest circles of London society; and was intelligent and cultivated like herself." That he was a Jew and therefore considered altogether unsuitable for Venetia by all her friends Lambert never mentions.

The First World War takes over the last third of the book. This part is better than the rest although much of the material is familiar. Lambert leans heavily for interpretation on Nicholas Mosley's *Julian Grenfell* and has not made enough use of Cynthia Asquith's war-time diaries. She has no particularly new insights to offer. The Souls deserved a better book. Laura Tennant's description of herself at the age of twenty-one, "a longing to understand, a great overwhelming ignorance, a sympathy for all that a bad except cowardice and ungenerosity" remains an endearing testament. And in their early years, at least, the Souls were a most attractive group. Alas, Mrs Lambert has buried their charm and endowed them with an unappealing posterity. The book is well illustrated. There are forty-eight pages of excellent photographs, marred by foolish captions.

## The mating game

Isabel Colegate

ADELIN HARTCUP  
*Love and Marriage in the Great Country House*  
240pp. Sidgwick and Jackson. £12.95.  
0263 990023

In her previous books Adeline Hartcup has given some account of life in both the servants' hall and the nursery of the nineteenth-century country house; now she moves on to the mating rituals of the drawing-room. "How does the past compare with the present?" she asks brightly. "How does it all add up?" She concludes that the advantage is not all with the twentieth century. "Freedom is a tricky horse to ride... it is a pleasure to retreat back into the past and in chandelied ballrooms and spanking carriages to meet men and women with instincts and emotions recognizably like our own."

In this mood she sets out to collect an anthology of those moves in the game which gave society something to gossip about at the time - and, in some cases ever since. She cheerfully repeats many an oft-told tale and one or two not so well known and she ranges from Byron's marriage to the equivocal *amities amouroses* of the "almost too brilliant to be true" Souls. She charts the successes and failures of those who conformed and the struggles for freedom of those who did not. She touches upon irregularities - the Ladies of Llangollen, Byron and his sister, Oscar Wilde - and on the agonies of sexual initiation for unsuspecting girls; she mentions the perils of childbirth and the difference in attitude to sex of men and of women; and tells of the ridicule attracted by those who too obviously married for money, such as the young Duke of St. Albans who

courted the widow of Thomas Coutts when she was fat and fifty and won for himself and his bride the nicknames Lord Noodle and Queen Dolabella.

The cheeriness of the author's style can be misleading. There is an implication that the doctor who attended at the birth of the sixth Duke of Devonshire, whose legitimacy was in question, "contributed to the mystery by shooting himself" as a result of something to do with that birth, whereas in fact it was because he rightly or wrongly took the full responsibility for the tragic death of Princess Charlotte and her baby.

The book ends with some chapters of "close-ups" on case-histories, including Byron's flirtation with the married Lady Frances Stanhope, the sad final letter of Lady Frederica Stanhope, who died in childbirth at the age of twenty-two and whose desolated husband hanged himself five years later, and some extracts from the diary of Lucy Lyttelton, who married Lord Frederick Cavendish, who as Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland was murdered in Phoenix Park, Dublin, in 1882.

The marriage market in which the landed aristocracy and gentry made their dynastic deals flourished throughout the nineteenth century, though the class whose interests it served was by the end of that century well on the way to economic and political decline; its social influence lasted the longest, and Adeline Hartcup records some of the resultant rituals of courtship, marriage and extra-marriage with evident enjoyment.

Portrait: Ireland 160 Ashmole 21p

SECOND-CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, NY. PRICE \$1.25. SUBSCRIBERS OUTSIDE THE US SHOULD ADD \$2.00 PER ANNUM. POSTAGE GUARANTEED. THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, NOVEMBER 30, 1984.

## Plas Newydd as paradise

Patricia Beer

ELIZABETH MAVOR (Editor)  
*Life with the Ladies of Llangollen*  
238pp. Viking. £7.95.  
0670 800384

The publication of *Life with the Ladies of Llangollen* suggests that these ladies may be about to multiply exceedingly in the way the Edwardian Lady has done. Calendars and drying-up cloths, table mats and gardening gloves, all stamped with images of Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby and their home Plas Newydd with its flowers and haystacks, may be ready waiting in the womb of time. The three elements necessary for that sort of cult are present: ladies, the country, and olden days. The fact that the Ladies were almost certainly lesbians might discourage some of their possible following but would be outweighed by the fact that they were aristocrats.

Ms Mavor's biography, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, appeared in 1971 and was much needed, if only to summarize and scotch the ludicrous untruths that had circulated about them since their deaths. In treating a subject which invites vulgarization, the biography as a whole finds exactly the right approach: neither solemn nor jolly, always informative and often touching. But perhaps enough was enough.

*Life with the Ladies of Llangollen* is, as Mavor explains, based on *The Hamwood Papers*, which appeared in 1930. This book was the initiative of Eva Mary Bell, whose family had inherited and passed down a collection of the Ladies' papers, kept at the family house, Hamwood, in County Meath: the core of Mrs Bell's book is a selection from Eleanor Butler's diaries.

Bell often shows signs of consciously using her material as an escape route, a way back to a

lost Eden. Clearly we are already on the road to Lark Rise and Edith Holden territory, and in her present book Mavor moves into the fast lane. "I have respected the current shift of interest... from the national to the local so that, like the Ladies themselves, I have considered the choice of a new pair of sugar-tongs of more moment than the Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy." This is hardly fair to the Ladies; Sarah Ponsonby was joking.

Mavor has grouped the material according to months, from 1778, the year when the two young women eloped from Ireland together to settle in Wales, to the year before Eleanor's death, 1828: an interesting idea though I am not sure it has the anti-linear effect that she intended. The selection is founded on Mrs Bell's, with the addition of extracts from unpublished papers: miscellaneous letters, a journal (Eleanor), accounts and recipes (Sarah). It embraces the unnecessary: "I took a dose of Caster oil" and the mildly interesting: "Workman in the Shrubbery 2 days 24d." It ranges from domestic intimacies: "Finished Spenser to my Love" to life outdoors: "Birds singing sweetly this silver Valentine's Day." It incorporates such home news as King George's fits of madness, and plenty of news, usually doleful, from abroad: "Dreadful account of the nastiness, misery, poverty and immorality which prevails at Paris."

As a matter of fact life at Llangollen was by no means the rustic retirement the Ladies liked to pretend and had sincerely aimed at. Visitors and letters poured in from a wider world, and when they were alone the women studied foreign languages and foreign texts which took their minds well beyond the parish boundaries. *Life with the Ladies of Llangollen* cannot help glancing at ambivalence of this kind but the selection as a whole leaves a strong taste of paradise lost. To look at, the book is unashamedly pretty and rural.

## TOM SHARPE WILT ON HIGH

"Tom Sharpe serves up the loudest laughs in literary comedy... He is the great post-War humorist, the Wodehouse who dares plunge into the bottomless vulgarity and hysteria of our times, and a rattling good companion on a train journey."

David Hughes, Mail on Sunday

"Tom Sharpe's plot in *Wilt on High* could never happen in real life. Yet such is his comic brilliance that one constantly reminds oneself how true to life his fiction is."

David Twiston Davies, Daily Telegraph

"A very funny book... It is perfect stuff, vintage Sharpe."

Stanley Reynolds, Punch

"*Wilt on High* has much to enjoy as well as something serious to say."

T.O. Treadwell, Times Literary Supplement

"Tom Sharpe is back on form... Returning to the Finland Feh and his greatest comic hero means that this time he stays Sharpe to the bottom of the glass."

Nicholas Shrimpton, Sunday Times

Secker's  
Warburg

£8.95

John G. Jones



## Peter Redgrove

*The Mystery Religion of W. B. Yeats* derives in part from lectures in which Professor Hough set himself the task of presenting Yeats's occult philosophy to a general literary audience. It does not, as the publisher's blurb claims, give an "extensive history of the occult tradition" and Hough makes it clear that he is aware of the radical simplification he is engaged upon. Its contribution is that the turning to and fro of its reasonable scepticism, always deferential to the poetry itself, will assist the kind of reader for whom the magic stands in the way of the poetry.

Thus also does Yeats's magic stand square in the Romantic tradition of the "runic script" of nature or *Chiffreschrift*, that "marvellous secret writing you find everywhere" of Novalis of Blake, and Boehme in *De Signatura Rerum* right back to Plotinus and Plato and maybe beyond.

Hought is on firmer ground in discussing the rewards he feels Yeats gained by occult studies. This poet is no Faustus torn to pieces by demons, but an affirmer, whose whole occult myth was "an indefinite extension of the phenomenal world, as though it were, that while Yeats wishes to make eternal," and who would arrive at the gates of paradise with all his earthly baggage intact "to be received and legitimated within the holy city."

We see these rewards, according to Hough, both in the poetry and in the person; in the life as well as the art, which Yeats himself doubt-

As to the personal reward, Hough recalls Virginia Woolf's meeting with Yeats in 1930 (the poet then being sixty-five). He notes that her diary entry was an act of homage and respect "not very common in the annals of Bloomsbury." Yeats talks about dreams and estates of the soul, about modern poetry and its deficiencies at the end of its era, about another system of thought that was due to arrive. Virginia Woolf, not accustomed to being over-impressed by distinguished men, calls him "vital, supple, high charged and altogether seasoned and generous", felt her own ignorance in comparison to his "complete psychology", spoke of the intricacy of his art, "also of its meanings, its seriousness, its importance, which wholly engrosses this large active minded immensely vitalised man". The actual diary entry (November 8) is a little more ironic than Hough's account suggests: "He seemed to live in the centre of an immensely intricate brain-bush; from which he could issue at any moment; & then withdraw again. And every twig was real to him."

Where I differ from Hough is in his insistence that the occult tradition be sketches for what was in its essence life-denying, so that Yeats can be seen as a particular exception. Indeed, Yeats was a particularly gifted and able practitioner, but the practices of training in the Golden Dawn were intended to bring about such results as these. There were, for example, rituals of assumption and transformation which were intended to bring about a state of expanded perception such as an incarnate god might experience, as an occult metaphysician, Theosophist, or even a mystic might.

**He wanted to tell them about the delays**

Look, still going! But the crowds—among them, at least one who is stunningly beautiful—have dispersed, a fine drizzle soaks into their litter, and the point of it all if there is one is lying becalmed in the bay of beyond, a tall ship on a very flat sea whose crew have gone scrambling up and over the rocks

**CHARLES BOYLE**

Then again, three most important aspects of the occult tradition are sidestepped in Hough's account. One is that it is not vicarious, that is, it is not a congeries of metaphysical statements conveyed by a priesthood, but a series of initiations into an immediate experience. So the tradition is more truly a series of techniques than what we ordinarily understand by "tradition". Hough does apply the distinction between *poiesis*, faith, and *gnosis*, knowledge; but not I think with sufficient emphasis between priesthood and shamanism. What we are talking about here is a tradition of techniques of European shamanism.

There is evidence that there was an undercurrent of Tantric teaching in Yeats's order, and indeed it is difficult to imagine the highly sensuous rituals being conducted without some sexual feeling. It is possible that the sexual religious teachings of Thomas Lake Harris began to influence some members of the Order at the same time as Yeats's refusal to initiate Aleister Crowley into the Second Order. He started the contentions which eventually broke up the Golden Dawn, to Yeats's great distress. The evidence is that Yeats staunchly defended the chastity of magic within the Golden Dawn, but that the female and sexual side of it became increasingly important to him. In a very early essay he spoke of finding "divine love in sexual passion" and there appears to have been some mystical or visionary marriage with Maud Gonne, if not in the carnal sense then in the

What is certainly true is that *A Vision*, the culmination of Yeats's occult practice, came through the mediumship of his wife, by a series of conjuring-trick arising from boredom or their honeymoon. George Yeats began by pretending automatic writing, but the gates soon opened, it took hold so hard that it quite overrode Yeats's previous magic training over more than thirty years. As he says "my initiation into the 'Hermetic Students' had filled my head with Cabballistic imagery, but there was nothing in Blake, Swedenborg, Boehme or the Cabballa to help me now".

The result was what Hough describes as the "literary kind" of an apocalypse, "forbidding and bizarre", nevertheless "stylistic arrangements of experience" (Yeats's words) in which his chief instrument — the Great Wheel of the Lunar Cycle — "with its twenty-eight phases" represents the twenty-eight incarnations which fulfil the whole possible range of human experience; and this pattern is so fundamental that it appears, on a larger or smaller scale, in every aspect of human life. Man passes through the same phases in a single incarnation, in a single judgement or act of thought...". Nevertheless Hough finds the Great Wheel quirky, idiosyncratic and full of puzzles, and it is here that his apologetics show the strain.

Again, I believe that this Great Work though it is certainly a departure from the Cabalistic Tree of Life in which Yeats trained much more in the occult tradition than Huxley will acknowledge. The communications occurred with the companionship of a woman, not a sexual ambience. The Tree of Life is sometimes described as "The Anatomy of the Body of God". This was Yeats's early study. Now it was almost as a defiant extension of magical work of the man he hated and spised, Aleister Crowley, described as "a speakable mad person", a true Anti-Self, sexual workings and his Scarlet Women Goddess 15 (which would correspond to Yeats's dark moon and full moon). Yeats now sought to make as plain as he could his complete vision of the Anatomy of the Body of God.

The puzzles in *A Vision* concerning Wheel become much clearer as one sees the movements of the Interpenetrating Forces Will, Mask, Creative Mind and Bodily Fate are, like the ancient pattern of woman's fertility cycle compared to that of the Moon as Goddess, movements towards away from physical incarnation. This is an immensely ancient and traditional magical symbol with the full moon representing ovulation, the dark moon menstruation. In R. C. Ellmann's words, "At phase 15 the unconscious incarnate is strongest, and at phase 1 the unconscious to incarnate is most powerful."

Recent anthropological work by Knight ("Levi-Strauss and the Dragon", March 1983) suggests that these two cults of the moon imaging forth human life stand behind much, and possibly all, legend and folklore. The interplay of moon, ovulation, incarnation, husband/offspring, subjective (supplied with social symbolism) human speech, and with dark moon, menstruation, making, magic children, transfiguration, prophetic speech and shamanism, primary and might be said to fulfil in "stylistic arrangements" "the whole possible range of human experience".

As I've pointed out before, and John N. Yague in a recent *Guardian* review (July 1984) of the new edition of the book reminded us again, Yeats gave the whole away in "The Gift of Haroun Al-Rasheed": "All, all those gyres and cubes and milky things/Are but a new expression of the old" . . . and now my utmost mystery lies in . . . Perhaps the tantalizing frustrations and incompletion just as a voice was about to utter a new branch of the philosophy" that he experienced during the communication with the Vision were because: It was a precursor of feminist philosophy now beginning to reflect the occult regions where it has been

**Herbert R. Southworth**

Pages 121–256 of Gérard Loiseaux's work contain the first translation of a book published in Germany in 1942, called *Phönix oder Asche*. The author, Bernhard Payr, was one of a group of German intellectuals who, from the Nazi seizure of power, had begun preparing for the propaganda war against France. He held a doctorate in Philology – his thesis concerned European Romanticism (B. T. A. Hoffman and Théophile Gautier) – visited Paris in 1934 and 1942, passed six months on the Russian front late in 1942 and then returned to his cultural work in Berlin. Nothing is known of him since January 1945.

The object of Payr's book was to explain the German people the problems involved in literary collaboration of French writers with the German occupier, and to evaluate the progress, setbacks and future of German propaganda in France. His judgment on French authors whom he considered to be *collaborateurs*—and he did not concern himself with the purely "literary" writers or those of the Résistance—was based less on their intrinsic literary worth than on their loyalty to German ambitions. The true collaborator placed all of his responsibility for the war on his own country; he was also hostile to Great Britain, to Gaulle, to the Third Republic and parliamentary democracy, to Freemasonry and to Communism ("socialism" was an accepted word, in "National Socialism"). But above all a candidate had to be antisemitic, an advocate of the *Lebensraum* of National Socialism.

the racial science of National Socialism. Thus, Payr distrusted Maurras and He Massia – theoretically, the antisemitism Action Française differed from that of Hift. Whereas Payr had profound misgivings about any French author whose antisemitism found to be lukewarm, he felt little inclined to recommend Céline's work; despite his admission for the hatred of the Jews shown by author of *Bagatelles pour un massacre* because he considered the crudeness of his language unfit for German readers. Loiseaux indicates that *Bibliographie de France*, during the eleven months following the fall of France, its

**S. S. Prawer**

**ANTON KAES (Editor)**  
**Weimarer Republik: Manifeste und**  
**Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1918-**  
**1933**  
711pp. Stuttgart: Metzler.  
3476004147

The Weimar Republic spawned so many literary groups and subgroups, each given to producing a multitude of manifestos, that even bulky volume like the one now put together by Anton Kaas has to be very selective and cannot possibly include all the still available tracts culled by pioneers such as Pöhl and Raabe. Every specialist will have a list of pieces he misses in the new book — no vol in the culture of the Weimar Republic is complete without some; at least, of the material gathered by Richard Huelsenbeck in his *Die literarische Dokumentation*; but where much is given, it would be churlish to complain about omissions.

The material Professor Kaes has brought together is arranged in rubrics that bespeak sociological orientation. The pieces he has selected attempt to answer such questions: How completely did the writers of the period represent the social and political divisions of the Weimar Republic? How did they feel about their new state? To what financial pressures

Among the writers whose works Payr recommended for translation into German were Jacques Benoist-Méchin, Alfred Fabre-Luce, Bertrand de Jouvenel and Alphonse de Chateaubriant. He also wrote favourably of such *collaborateurs* as Robert Brasillach, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Jacques Chardonne, Henry de Montherlant and Lucien Rebatet. In his conclusions, he recognized that the *collaboration* of French writers had by 1943 produced no outstanding results, and that a greater understanding by the French of the Franco-German problems would depend on the final victory of the Nazi armies.

Loiseau's book is essentially an analysis of Payr's work, coupled with other new documentation from German sources, and from the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Vienna. It poses a fundamental question. Why were some of the best-known literary and political writers of France so ready to collaborate? The answer to this question involves the nature of fascism. Fascism took a firm root in Italy; then in Germany, but never found the French (or British) soil appropriate for its growth. Most of the French literary collaborators were far more attracted to German Nazism than to Italian Fascism, and had been pro-German before the defeat of 1940. At the same time, they saw themselves as French "nationalists". Hitler was a German nationalist, but also a German imperialist; the *collaborateurs* were French "nationalists" and likewise German imperialists. How did they reconcile their nationalism with their allegiance to German expansion? By 1941, they could hardly have failed to see that the victorious Nazis were going to keep Alsace and Lorraine and the lands in Northern France already being colonized by Germans; and eventually the French Empire. To explain this blindness to the real situation in terms of loyalty to the ideals of the "New Europe" is straining our powers of belief.

Most of the régimes that collaborated at one time or another with the Nazis did so for promised price. Even the literary spokesmen for the Spanish Falangist, José María de Arellano and Fernando María de Castiella, made demands – outlandish ones – in payment for Spanish military intervention in the war. Why did the French literary *collaborateurs* ask for exchange for their help? Loiseux's book, which is the most serious study of the subject to have appeared, seems to show only two services offered to the *collaborateurs*, in requital for their prose: 1) German protection against

tion did they, and their readers, receive, at what prevailing literary tastes did they conform or conform to? What censorship was exerted either officially or unofficially? What were the conditions of production and publication in a world whose technologies were changing with relative rapidity? What was the relation of literature to broadcasting, films, advertising, the newspaper *feuilleton*? How great was the gulf, and what were the interconnections, between what used to be called "high-brow," "middle-brow" and "low-brow" writing? Were foreign influences were important, and what attitudes did various writers take up toward the literature of their own country's past?

After printing documents which give representative answers to such questions Kaes turns his attention to specific literary forms. It is here that he allows various contemporary voices to speak about the documentary impulses which gave rise to the "New Sobriety" or *Neue Sachlichkeit*; women's literature (yes, there was a good deal of discussion about *écriture féminine* in 1928 and 1933); "proletarian" writings (between 1918 and 1933); the "classical" theatre (library fodder); the "classical" theatre (*Bildungstheater*); and the new political "agit-prop" theatre of Piscator and others. There is also a brief section on changing forms of lyric poetry - but here the delimitations had to be accepted by contributors to the Meyer series of which this book is part shown by. Since a separate volume has been voted to German Expressionism, one of

the Bolshevik menace from the East and against social unrest in France itself ("Better Hitler than Léon Blum"); and 2) German aid in killing the French Jews. This constitutes one of the most stupid and terrifying bargains of the century. Loiseux makes clear from German sources that the Nazis had no intention of leaving even crumbs for the French once they had achieved their final victory. He also points out that, whereas the German antisemites allowed the French antisemites to consider themselves superior to the Jews, they kept the privilege of considering themselves superior to the French antisemites.

After the war, the political activists of collaboration fared worse than the writers who suggested and defended their crimes; proportionately more of them were condemned to death or to long prison sentences. But Loiseaux's judgment on the writers is severe:

After the war the collaborationist writers took care not to sound their consciences on the rôle they had played in the German propaganda apparatus. They placed their production under the obliging and fraudulent banner of "Literature" in order to pass the contraband of "euro-germanisme" – which other forms of propaganda used by the Germans would have rendered less credible. They had thus lowered the "threshold of acceptability" of collaborationism, especially with the cultivated élites", at least at the beginning of the Occupation.

The French literary advocates of Hitler's "New Europe" who survived the first post-war years found life not to be too miserable in France. Fabre-Luce was for many years a contributor to *Le Monde*; Jouhandeau knew international fame; Montherlant and Paul Morand entered the Académie Française (Maurras and other members had been pushed out); Benoît Méchin became a highly successful author; Georges Blond is a best-seller in France today and Bertrand de Jouvenel has frequently been presented on French television as a profound thinker on social and political problems. Even the Nazis who supervised this literary collaboration have found their own memoirs

profitable properties, in France as well as Germany, and the most lionized, Gerhart Heller, had his days of glory in the French press and on television. (Loiseau has pertinent remarks to make on this particular case.) Even most people in France seem to have forgotten the past loyalties of the *collaborateurs*, a television interviewer never seek to embarrass them with close questioning; the viewer who remembers the war may wonder times if the surviving *collaborateurs* realize the good fortune they had in losing their — a Hitler's — war.

of Weimar Germany is all but absent from Kaer's collection.

There are, however, large compensations. The new volume includes a sizeable section on Nationalism, for instance, as it shows itself in literary programmes and manifestos. It provides important pronouncements by Moeller van den Bruck and others to illustrate notions of "conservative revolution", the idea of German "mission", anti- and philosemitism, the beginnings of National Socialism, as well as the losing fight which German intellectuals fought with Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Ernst Bloch and Walter Mehring. Lion Feuchtwanger and others put up against these trends. We also find sections on attempts by writers in the Weimar Republic to appeal to, or to speak for, workers in the cities and the countryside variously dubbed "the proletariat" or "the working class" (or simply *Arbeiter und Bauern*); on poetically grammatically "non-political" writers; and the beginnings of that "inner emigration" which was to play so powerful and often questionable a part in poems to the "Nazification" tribunals set up after the Second World War.

A brief but informative introduction; planetary notes, a useful bibliography and an index of names complete a volume affords fascinating insights into the philosophies, utterances and interpretations which not only expressed but also shaped the consciousness of readers and writers in the shivered, but culturally so important, Weimar Republic.

# POLITICS

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هَذَا مِنْ أَعْمَالِ



# On the track of the rhino

Peter Metcalf

**REDMOND O'HANLON**  
*Into the Heart of Borneo: An account of a journey made in 1983 to the mountains of Batu Tiban with James Fenton*  
192pp. Edinburgh: Salamander. £10.95.  
0907540554

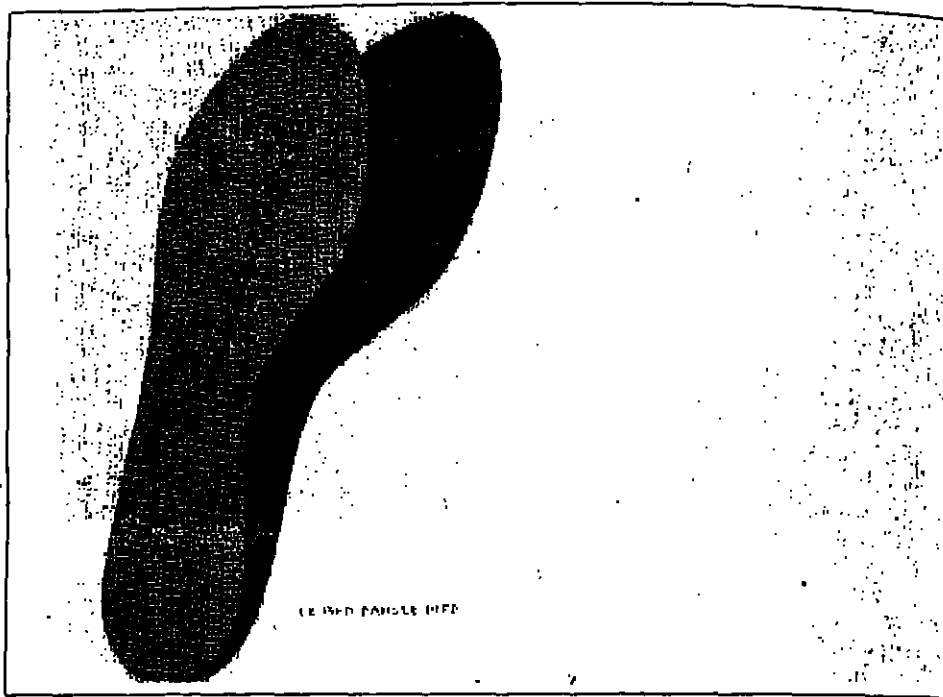
*Into the Heart of Borneo* tells of a journey in the grand nineteenth-century manner: up a winding river, deep into tropical jungle towards a blank on the map. There is also a quest, to locate the rare Borneo rhinoceros. The expedition had the backing, so the dust-jacket tells us, of the British Museum (Natural History), the Harvard University Museum of Comparative Zoology and the University of Oxford. All this sounds portentous, but the book is just the opposite. Its style is from the outset breezy and engaging, without a hint of pretension or sensationalism. The photographic illustrations are reassuringly unspectacular. They would not have got a second glance from the editors of *National Geographic*.

Indeed, the trappings of a scientific expedition are superficial. Evidently it was Redmond O'Hanlon's companion, the poet James Fenton, who dreamed up the trip, and his smooth tongue that talked such prestigious institutions into backing it. That turned out to be a good move. Without their names, and an all-purpose official letter bearing an impressive seal, Messrs O'Hanlon and Fenton would clearly not have been allowed by the local authorities to go off as they did into unsupervised areas. In the event, the research activities seem to have been minimal, consisting mostly of a little bird-watching along the way. Moreover, the result of the quest is anticlimactic. In the lame closing scene, an old man in a remote community,

contentedly full of Guinness, boasts that he slaughtered the wild rhino wholesale many years ago, as a young man. But none of that matters. Underneath the trappings, this trip was obviously designed for the fun of it. We share the fun through O'Hanlon's sprightly narrative. Its strength is one of evocation; of the jungle itself, and of the subtle ambiguities of interaction with the ex-primitives in the post-imperial epoch.

The bulk of the account describes a journey up the largely uninhabited Baleh river. Here the flora and fauna are undisturbed, the jungle virgin. Without overglamorizing it, O'Hanlon effectively captures its appeal. The characters of his three Iban guides, playful and imperturbable, emerge forcefully. In the last chapters, describing a trip along a more populated river, we are offered vignettes of contemporary Borneo. A young schoolmaster complains of the small-mindedness of a Britain that abolishes the scholarship programme that was his lodestone through years of English education. Without even the hope of escape, he feels abandoned by the culture that he admired. Arriving finally at the settlement of the fabulous Ukit, wild men of the jungles, Fenton and O'Hanlon are mobbed by excited teenagers who despise their elders and want only to learn the latest disco dances.

Around the turn of the century, Borneo received a great deal of attention from explorers, who produced a literature to which O'Hanlon frequently refers. Later, other places, such as New Guinea, caught the imagination of adventurers, and Borneo was largely forgotten. Still there was a trickle of travel books about the island and its people, many of them indifferent in quality, and some downright libellous. *Into the Heart of Borneo* is a cut above these. It may not teach a great amount of facts about the island, but it does convey its feel with honesty and sympathy.



Man Ray's collage "Le Pied dans le pied" will be offered for sale at Christie's on December 4.

## Up-river to Paradise

Paul Henley

**BRIAN KELLY and MARK LONDON**  
*Amazon*  
382pp. Hale. £12.95.  
070901788X

In Amazonian travel writing, as in much Latin American fictional literature, the boundary between the real and the fantastical has always been tenuous. This is true even of the very first exemplar of the genre, the journal written by Fr Gaspar de Carvajal, one of the band that made the first, and entirely unintentional descent of the Amazon by Europeans in 1542. On the way, they were attacked by a group of warriors with long flowing locks. These could have been any one of the many aboriginal peoples who then inhabited the banks of the Amazon and amongst whom long hair was customary both for men and for women. But Carvajal's band, their imaginations no doubt running wild as they were carried into the unknown, believed that they had been attacked by the Amazon women of Greek legend. Only Carvajal himself was not convinced: if these were Amazons, he asked, why, in order to avoid painful encumbrance with their bowstrings, had they not cut off their right breasts, as indicated in the classical sources? In our more sceptical times, we might ask why, if Carvajal got close enough to see that the assailants' right breasts had not been lopped off, he did not notice at the same time that they were men? In any case, Carvajal's contemporaries did not take his quibbles seriously and the river was named after the mythical warrior women.

In that it strings the true and the fantastical together in a seamless narrative, *Amazon* falls fair and square into the established tradition of Amazonian travelogues. Brian Kelly and Mark London spent a year travelling around the now well-beaten track of journalists researching books on the region. After talking to politicians and bureaucrats, businessmen and academics in the cities, Kelly and London head inland for Quidá. From here they travel north along the BR 364, meeting landowners great and small, expatriate farm and sawmill managers, poor settlers and squatters. They also interview a number of radical priests and visit a Kayapo Indian reservation. Having reached the Transamazon Highway, they make visits to the Serra Pelada gold-mine, the Tucuruí dam complex and the Parakaná reservation that will eventually be flooded out by the latter. In the final phase of the journey, they visit Daniel K. Ludwig's empire at Jará, sample the cuisine of Santarém and travel up the Amazon as far as Manaus on an ancient paddle-steamer. In an attempt to see the upper river, they fly to Lima and, by coming downstream from Iquitos, however, the journey proves more difficult than in Carvajal's time and they get no further down than Letícia. Feeling defeated, they fly home to Miami.

The authors claim that before the trip they spent two years reading everything about the

topic articles on the Pleistocene refugia theory to travelogues of the "I Was A Head-Hunter" variety. However their book shows very little evidence of this reading and involves no sustained intellectual argument. Rather it consists essentially of a series of vignettes that portray the people who are the flesh-and-blood of what is known so dryly in the academic literature as "the development of the Amazon". These portraits are, for the most part, no more than thumb-nail sketches. Moreover, as reproduced in the verbatim style favoured by Kelly and London, all those portrayed, whatever their station in life, speak in the plummy epigrams that are the stock-in-trade of North American news weeklies. But the majority of these portraits ring true and anyone who has travelled in the region will be able to identify the archetypes that he has himself met.

For it seems from this account that the people who live in rural Brazil are caught up in the same mixture of the real and the fantastical as the characters of Latin American fiction. Take, for example, the wealthy businessman who collects statistics about everything under the Amazonian sun and whose cousin has written a dictionary of Amazonian Jewish patois, or the downy climatologist by the name of Carlos Marx who sits in a vast concrete office block calculating the time it will take to destroy all traces of the Amazon forest; or Sílva Shockness, the ancient Grenadian who maintains the station and rolling-stock of the Madeira-Mamoré railway in perfect condition even though there are no locomotives other than a series of rusting hulks strung out along a line long since taken over by the forest; or the illiterate gold prospector who having struck it rich at Serra Pelada swore to build the biggest, best equipped warehouse in the Amazon.

Even the authors themselves are part of this fictional tradition for they, like so many of those whom they describe, went to the Amazon in search of a dream. In the preface, they reveal that they had originally intended to call the book *Where Dreams Die* since the Amazon never quite lives up to the myths about it. On reflection, however, they decided against this title on the grounds that despite the hardships that the people they met had gone through, most had preserved their dreams intact. This also seems to apply to the authors; for although they never encountered the natural Paradise they were looking for, where flocks of pink flamingo and herds of peccary are said to roam, they preserve the niggling doubt that it may lie in that stretch of the Amazon they could not reach, between Letícia and Manaus.

This is a book for the bedside rather than the study. But the authors Kelly and London have an eye for the paradoxes and ironies of rural Latin America. All those who, like them, have spent a long night travelling in a Latin American bus with a naked madman strapped in the seat beside them, should be warned that it will keep them awake into the small hours. Yet the last pages of the book live in the story rather than in the telling of it.

# Relics of the rubber people

Norman Hammond

**DAVID C. GROVE**  
*Chalcatzingo: Excavations on the Olmec frontier*  
184pp, 141 illustrations, 15 in colour. Thames and Hudson. £18.  
0500390193

The Olmec have been controversial since they were first discovered half a century ago. When the great stone heads first emerged from the tropical forest of the Mexican Gulf Coast, they were attributed to a late prehispanic people, the shadowy "Olmeca" or "rubber people", who had lived in the region in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The great Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias was one of the few who championed an earlier date for the monuments, and most of the establishment figures of Mesoamerican archaeology dismissed the possibility of a complex society earlier than the Classic Maya as absurd. Even when the late Matthew Stirling found an inscription at Tres Zapotes, bearing on one side a late Olmec-style mask and on the other a date equivalent to 31 BC in the Maya calendar, nearly four centuries older than the earliest known Maya stela, the response of the leading Maya epigrapher of the time, the late Sir Eric Thompson, was that a different calendrical system must have been in use. It was not until the advent of radiocarbon dating in the 1950s, and the work of Heizer and others at La Venta and Coe at San Lorenzo, that it was incontrovertibly established that the Olmec sites and their massive monuments were a millennium and more older than the Classic Maya, with a floruit in the late second and early first millennia BC.

Controversy was not stilled, although its focus changed: the idea of a "mother culture" underlying all subsequent developments in Mesoamerica was advanced by the protagonists of Olmec cultural, as well as chronological, primacy. For a while the Olmec did seem to have developed a complex society earlier than any other parts of Mesoamerica, or the New World in general, but field-work over the past two decades in Oaxaca and the Maya lowlands has shown that societies there also attained a fair degree of organization in the late second millennium BC. While the Olmec sculptures remain in their size and competence a striking indication of how rapidly a superstructure could develop on an economic base of village farming and a social structure of chiefdom level, the society that they memorialized was not unique for its time, just different.

There were differences within the Olmec world, too: while the largest sites, and the most spectacular sculptures, were concentrated in the swamps of the Gulf Coast lowlands, other sites with immovable art of unquestionably Olmec style were known as far away as the Pacific slopes of El Salvador, at Chalchuapa, in caves in Guerrero, and in the highlands of Morelos at Chalcatzingo, the site which is the subject of this book.

Chalcatzingo was discovered in the early 1930s, when a storm washed the soil-covering off the rock-carving known as "El Rey", the king, a seated person within a stylized cave that emitted clouds and had associated symbols for rain and jade—the latter a common Mesoamerican symbol for flowing water because it was both green and precious. Other carvings were found over the years, and it became clear that the site was a major focus of Olmec art, far away from the lowland centres which were thought to be the core of the culture. At the same time, portable art in "Olmec style" (a style defined by a circular reasoning of assertion and subsequent citation) from other sites in the highlands, notably Las Bocas, began to flood on to the market in illegally exported antiquities together with many fakes, and the concept of a "highland Olmec" which might in some way be the stimulus to the development of the lowland centres was mooted.

David C. Grove's research, at Chalcatzingo and elsewhere in Morelos, has put these ideas firmly in their place: the Olmec development was essentially lowland and Gulf Coast, and Chalcatzingo is in its essential features a highland Mexican site with numerous links to other communities in the upland basins from the Valley of Mexico east to Oaxaca. What Olmec features there were present were confined in their expression to an élite group comprising not more than ten per cent of the population (on the basis of burial ceremonial). For most of the book Grove implies that this élite was local, acquiring Olmec goods and attributes by acculturation and emulation, but at one point his concept of Chalcatzingo as a "frontier outpost" suggests a sneaking desire to bring them from the Gulf Coast.

The excavations, reported in a plain, almost chatty style which makes the rationale of the research clear even to the uninitiate, showed that Chalcatzingo was occupied from about 1500 to 500 BC. For the first four centuries it was a hamlet, although possessing one large cobble-faced mound which could have supported a public building; for the second four it was a village of several hundred people, who built a series of level agricultural and residential terraces in the natural amphitheatre at the foot of the mountains, and channelled the streams that came down from them.

In the third period, from about 700 to 500 BC, Chalcatzingo became a major centre, although still with a small population. Large mounds were built as the bases for buildings, platforms were set with stelae standing in them, and most if not all of the monumental art at the site was created. This included rock-carvings on the mountain, from the peak downwards, and on large boulders in the piedmont, as well as the shaft-like stelae within the community. Most of the stelae were subsequently mutilated, with the faces of their human subjects ground or smashed away, but the sculptures on the mountain, portraying supernatural beings in the form of humans and jaguars, were left inviolate.

From his study of the stelae, with their stiff profile figures displaying complex attributes and costumes, and numerous figurines which seem to depict recognizable individuals, Grove has developed a theory, surely correct, that we have the beginnings of a ruler cult, expressed in both public and folk art. By re-examining the great heads of the Gulf Coast centres, he shows that similar individualizing attributes are present there also. The mutilation of these secular monuments can then be associated with changing human fortunes, specifically the death of the ruler portrayed, rather than with iconoclasm or revolution.

In his discussion Grove challenges a number of other more or less received ideas about the Olmec: whatever the cause of the appearance of metropolitan Olmec art all the way from Morelos to El Salvador and Chiapas, he sees no evidence to support the notions of military incursion, missionary activity, folk migration or directed colonization which have been advanced at different times. If any cause can be discerned, he would apparently see it in the realm of interregional economic contacts, with Chalcatzingo acting as a "gateway community" that funnelled valuable mineral products such as obsidian, kaolin and iron ore (for pigment) from central and western Mexico towards Oaxaca, the Gulf Coast and the Maya Area. The fall of Chalcatzingo, and the Olmec generally, he ascribes to the disruption of these established networks, specifically by the rise of highland societies underpinned by the intensive irrigation-fed agriculture.

One of the most valuable points to emerge from this book, although Grove only hints at it, is how far southern Mesoamerica in the early and middle first millennium BC was an intellectual *oikumenē*: the highlands around Chalcatzingo, the Olmec sites of the Gulf lowlands, Oaxaca, and only slightly later the Maya Area, all shared a cult of the ruler using stelae (and ritually mutilating them), making offerings of jade in dedicatory and valedictory ritual, and of human blood let from the soft parts of the body with obsidian lancets or sting-ray spines. Pottery style, in decorative motifs and kaolin slipping, had commonly accepted notions as far east as the valley of Guatemala and down into the Maya lowlands. A small, élite controlled society and its resources, and supplied itself with desirable goods from long distances. While the Olmecs were not the only beguilers of Mesoamerican civilization, they were the first to use the resources, material and human, of an increasingly complex society to commemorate that élite in a public and political art style.

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# The Hertfordshire idea

Guy Oddie

STUART MACLURE  
Educational Development and School Building:  
Aspects of public policy 1945-73  
283pp. Longman. £14.95.  
0582 032962

Here is a book to interest a far wider readership than its dry though accurate title might suggest. Enlivened by deliciously pointed vignettes of the personalities involved, it vividly reveals the powerful influence exerted, over three decades, by hidden rulers in the senior civil service and the upper tiers of local government. It shows how, through swings of government from left to right, school-building policy was largely shaped by the "progressive" convictions of a handful of mutually sympathetic educationists and architects. And it sheds light also on the interactions that occur between social and architectural values – and on the consequent dilemmas and conflicts arising from them.

In essence the story concerns this country's school building achievements since the end of the Second World War: first in winning the race against time to provide enough roofs over heads, and then in meeting new needs as they arose from developments at primary and secondary level – consistently meeting them on time and at a politically acceptable cost, yet still on the whole improving standards. These are achievements ungrudgingly acknowledged as unequalled by the many countries that have faced similar problems and which continue to respect our example in attacking the different problems of today. Parts of the story have been told before, usually from a partisan viewpoint. This is the definitive version, complete and unabridged, portrayed with impeccable scholarship in perceptive detail, not omitting the wars.

Seeds of what will be called the post-war educational revolution were sown. Stuart MacLure's book is a history of education in the 1920s. But they lay neglected until 1941, when, at ebbtide in our wartime fortunes, we see them germinating, along with other plans for a more humane and just society to follow victory over Hitler. With peace begins the race against time, school-building investment rapidly accelerating from a standing start to £50 million a year, driven by a corner-cutting Ministry of Education mandarin named Anthony Part, and largely spent on prefab huts, quick but nasty.

The scene then shifts to the county architect's department of Hertfordshire – cradle, nursery, test-bed and launching-pad for the three most important ideas underlying the achievement. First the idea that prefabrication, far from being an unwelcome expedient, opened the way to an architecture which would fulfil the highest promise of the machine age. Second, that school design should be inspired, not by preconceptions of architectural excellence, but by the needs and activities of children and their teachers. Third and most important, that the ideal of quality architecture produced in quantity – like Georgian housing – for popular consumption at popular prices, was attainable only by concerted teamwork in a continuous process of sustained development.

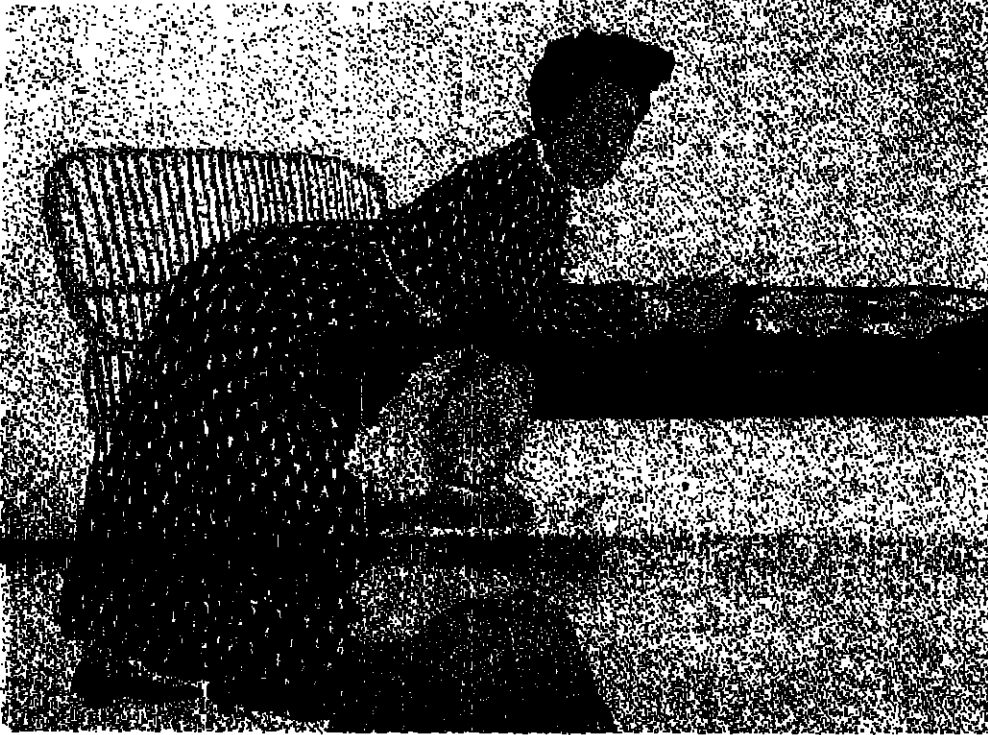
All three ideas seemed fully justified by the first schools to result from the Hertfordshire system of prefabrication. And they became the basis of national policy when Sirat Johnson-Marsshall, the guiding genius behind the Herts success, moved into the Ministry as its chief architect, to work alongside Part and share with him the joint leadership of the Architects and Buildings Branch which was to administer the national school construction programme.

The Ministry pursued the first idea by encouraging the development, by voluntary consortia of public authority customers, of education-oriented industrialized-building systems which, unlike their disastrous housing counterparts, were controlled in the customers' interests by the consortia's own architects. MacLure's verdict on the results is double-edged. "Without this policy, fewer schools would have been built, more slowly... less good value for money would have been obtained... the quality of working environment offered to pupils and teachers... is better than could otherwise have been assumed." But instancing

the system-built "colleges" of the University of York he writes, "Notwithstanding the fine landscaping... the result... remains a collection of drab buildings... getting no better as they age."

The second key idea – intensive study of user needs and how best to satisfy them – immediately became and has since remained a hallmark of the Ministry architects' approach. It centred on observing the activities of teachers and children at work and on questioning the philosophies behind those activities. By thus prompting teachers to express their objectives in concrete terms, it was a method of inquiry which, besides inspiring the design solution, helped to translate pedagogic theory into practice.

The method owed nothing to the sampling techniques or opinion tests of social science – only the best practice was thought worth studying, because where the best practice led the conservative majority might be persuaded eventually to follow. Inspectorate colleagues and a network of personal contacts cultivated in the educational world pointed the architects towards the interesting pedagogic innovations.



Leon Bakst's "The Cards" which was sold at Sotheby's on February 15 for £13,200 and is reproduced from Art at Auction: The Year at Sotheby's 1983-84 (416pp. Sotheby Publications. £19.95. 085667 188 6).

## Bristol fashion

Gillian Sutherland

PHIL GARDNER  
The Last Elementary Schools of Victorian  
England  
296pp. Croom Helm. £22.50.  
07099 11564

We now know quite a lot about the strategies developed by nineteenth-century elite groups for the education of the mass of the population. We still know all too little about the responses of that mass and even less of what we know comes directly from working-class sources. The historiography of nineteenth-century education has been heavily dependent on, indeed largely formed by, middle and upper-class accounts of the attitudes towards education of the labouring poor. Phil Gardner has now most effectively set about redressing the balance, not only with a critical scrutiny of those middle and upper-class accounts and the statistics they trailed in their wake, but also with a detailed examination of one area, Bristol, from the 1840s to the 1890s. In the latter he brings together every scrap of material surviving about private working-class schools, schools conducted by the working class for the children of the working class, run for profit, with no endowment, claiming no government grant, with no affiliation to any national organization or society. The net result is to make us take such provision very much more seriously than hitherto. There was clearly a great deal more of it and it lasted rather longer than middle-class observers, spearheaded by Her Majesty's Inspectorate, cared to admit. Dr Gardner's chapter, "Numbers," should be required

"But", remarks Maclure coldly, "in making their selection of what was best practice they were expressing their own value judgements and were not immune to the powerful influence of fashion in social and educational ideology." He does not say what he would have had them do instead.

The user studies, together with the design of building systems, were aspects of Johnson-Marsshall's idea of "development" and of a professional Development Group dedicated to it. The Ministry's central task, as he and Part saw it, was to galvanize the local authorities into getting value for their school-building money. If the local authorities were to pay due heed, Ministry procedures, advice and exhortation would have to stand the test of practice as well as that of administrative feasibility. Hence his insistence that Ministry architects should venture well beyond desk studies or the mere vetting of other people's work – they themselves should pioneer developments and, above all, design real buildings which would offer leadership by example. When these "development projects" materialized they enjoyed no favours and were subject to the same constraints, in-

cluding those of cost and time, as applied to any other. By seeing them through, the Development Group not only won respect by practising what it taught the Ministry to preach, it brought into the Ministry a first-hand experience of problems that those in the front line were up against.

Over the intervening years the Development Group has kept abreast of change, modifying its emphases to suit new foci of attention, but always with live projects anchoring it in reality. It emerges as the least tarnished hero of Maclure's somewhat sour assessment. Despite the very different climate now prevailing, it remains, he says, "a powerhouse of ideas... to be valued by Ministers and senior administrators for the significance of its influence... not for the size of building programme over which it presides".

Most of Maclure's judgments are so scrupulously fair that it is a matter for regret that he remains so non-committal. He will not say, for instance, whether he sides with the child-centred "progressive" pedagogy which so attracted the Development Group, or with what he calls the "more considered critique of Plowden ideology". He overlooks entirely the early schools of the most successful consortium, CLASP, or at any rate fails to notice how close they came to matching the tile-hung and clapboard gaiety of the well-loved vernacular of south-east England.

Yet no one can quarrel with the main conclusions – that "the post-war welfare state consensus and the bi-partisan, liberal, expansionist view of education were part of the same skein" and that school building "drew on the same inspiration, with its conscious search for non-elitist, cost-effective schools capable of being generalised and made, in some meaningful sense, architecture for the people".

We can now see 1945-73 as a flowering of the Puritan tradition, and the reaction as a kind of Restoration flippancy. But the architectural trail remains elusive. It will not be found by exchanging what a seventeenth-century divine called "the squalid sluttish of fanatic conventicles" for "the meretricious gaudiness of Rome", ie, the shallow bombast of post-modernism. Johnson-Marsshall would have looked for it in further development somewhere in between.

Richard Johnson, have noted: that Cobbett's educational notions were essentially appropriate to the small producer household, increasingly less easily translated to the world of the urban worker.

But two features in particular of the working-class private school, for which Gardner has evidence and of which he could make more, mark it out as distinctive: its discipline and the special place of reading. Time and again, the informality and friendliness, the function of the teacher as surrogate parent in the small private school are stressed, not only in the fragments coming from the mid-nineteenth century but also in the recollections of those who attended such schools as survived into the early twentieth century, whom Gardner has tracked down. Another of our legends from the nineteenth-century middle-class pundits is the treatment of reading, writing and arithmetic as an integrated package. But in seventeenth-century England the curriculum was clearly treated as sequential: reading was taught first; writing and then arithmetic came later and separate fees were charged for each. Many, probably the majority, of the labouring poor got no further than the first stage. But reading unlocked more doors than either of the other two skills; and we need to remind ourselves that reading was a public act: those who could read, read aloud to those who could not, in the home, in the workplace, in the chapel, in the pub. Dr Gardner's evidence suggests that the "specialness" of reading, its centrality to what the working class understood by schooling, survived well into the nineteenth century. Reading, far more than writing, let alone arithmetic, was for the nineteenth-century working class the "really useful knowledge".

Gardner wants to move from this to argue that working-class notions of schooling represented a quite distinctive cultural phenomenon. This is more difficult and debatable ground; it is simply because of the paucity of evidence. There simply does not seem to be the material available to discover whether the notions of Owen, Cobbett or the Chartists about "really useful knowledge" found any resonance in these Bristol kitchens and back rooms. There is, too, the further problem, as both R. B. Thomson and Williams have

noted, that the working-class notion of schooling was essentially appropriate to the small producer household, increasingly less easily translated to the world of the urban worker.

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# Loan dangers

George Szamuely

DARRELL DELAMAIDE  
Debt Shock: The inside story of the crisis that threatens the world's banks and stock markets  
280pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £9.95.  
0287 783793  
WILLIAM CLARK  
Cataclysm: The North-South conflict of 1987  
216pp. Sidgwick and Jackson. £10.95.  
0283 990406

On August 20, 1982, Mexico declared that it was insolvent and was suspending repayment on its foreign debt. In the public mind at least it was this event that sparked off what has come to be known as the "world banking crisis". Thoughtful observers had, however, been predicting its occurrence for almost ten years; in fact ever since the money that had disappeared into Arab hands as a result of the gigantic increases in the price of oil, reappeared in the West as enormous quantities of bank certificates and bonds were bought up. What had been lost on the swings was now gained on the roundabouts. But when this sudden windfall was lent out to all and sundry around the globe, a troublesome question inevitably raised itself. Whereas within states, when debtors are unable to pay back their loans, there are well-established procedures that creditors can undertake to recoup their losses, there are no accepted conventions to be followed if a sovereign nation announces one day that it is unable to meet its financial obligations. What action should be taken? Sending in gunboats is, after all, no longer the done thing.

Both books under review assume more or less explicitly that the present crisis, just as much as the oil crisis, is the manifestation of something much greater – of a profound change in the balance of power in the world. In

## Breaking the bank

Rupert Cornwell

LUGI DI FONZO  
St Peter's Banker  
311pp. Edinburgh: Mainstream. £9.95.  
0904591741

Italians who have ventured into the United States banking industry have had contrasting careers, to put it mildly. Amadeo Giannini arrived as a penniless immigrant in California in the late nineteenth century. By dint of thrift and enterprise he built up a modest bank from nothing. It was called the Bank of Italy and it never closed – not even on the day after the earthquake which flattened half San Francisco in 1906. The legacy of Giannini is the modern Bank of America, for a long time the largest commercial bank in the world.

The best part of a century later and 3,000 miles away to the East, another and rather better-heeled immigrant called Michele Sindona set up shop. His connections too were more impressive than those of Giannini, and included David Kenney, a Treasury Secretary under President Nixon, the Vatican, anti-Communists everywhere, and the Mafia. He bought, ready-made, the Franklin National Bank, in 1972. No matter that it was the eighth largest in the country, and that its Fifth Avenue branch was decked out with Persian carpets and Louis XV bureaux. The persuasive Mr Sindona abused and looted the wretched Franklin so comprehensively that it collapsed two years later. His contribution to financial history is America's worst, and Italy's second worst bank failure, since the last war.

A subject well worth writing about, clearly; and if the breathless claim of this book is to be believed, Luigi di Fonzo has done his homework. More than a million documents read, 432 interviews conducted, yielding 3,000 hours of tape-recorded material, even the testimony of four doctors who treated Sindona for medical and psychiatric problems. We discover everything from the minutiae of the transactions by which he stole the money of his Italian banks to the narrowness of the birth canal of his mother. This, we are told, made

Debt Shock Darrell Delamaide puts it this way:

There will be a second debt shock, just as there was a second oil shock. The debt shock is not an economic event any more than the oil shock was. It is political. It is a tremor caused by a massive shift in power. The Arabs and other producers wanted a voice in how the world was run.

But the "world banking crisis" is a more complicated affair than that of a number of Third World countries using the sanction of withholding repayment on their debts as a way of re-ordering the world according to their tastes. For one thing, it would probably be more accurate to use the word "paradox" rather than "crisis". The paradox can be stated like this. If a sovereign state fails to make his interest payment on time he is in effect in default. And because the exposure of all the major banks to the East European and Latin American debtors is so extensive, a single default would be enough to cause a run on the banks. Consequently it must be avoided at all costs. If, however, it were to be insisted in every case that payment be made on time, the strain placed upon a debtor in meeting his obligations could be so severe as to lead to politically disastrous consequences. (Revolution and dictatorship for Latin America, closer integration within COMECON – and hence reinforced Soviet domination – for Eastern Europe.)

Delamaide traces authoritatively the course Western governments took in attempting to resolve this dilemma. The policy they in fact finally came up with was extraordinarily intricate. Through the offices of the International Monetary Fund they would borrow money from the banks, which they would then hand over to the Fund, who thereupon would return the money to the banks, who would then make believe that this sum constituted the latest instalment on the debt of a sovereign debtor.

the delivery of the infant Michele so difficult that he entered the world partly asphyxiated. "A certain number of brain cells were destroyed", a doctor is quoted as saying.

Unfortunately, what is obscured amid all the diligent research is much of the essence of Sindona. He was, as Di Fonzo correctly points out, obsessive and megalomaniac, quick-witted and menacing, and a natural corrupter of men. What fails to emerge is his charm, the hypnotic ability to convince. Sindona, even in prison in America and now Italy, has retained this quality: without it he would never have started, with it he moved mountains.

St Peter's Banker falls into uneven parts. The title itself is somewhat misleading, since the Vatican features only in the first of them, as Sindona constructs his financial base in Italy. Rarely does Di Fonzo rise above the cliché, especially the hoary one about the huge wealth of the Holy See. The gold reserves of the Vatican exceed \$3 billion, the author claims. If only they did, Pope John Paul II must be tempted to reply, as the Vatican scrapes together \$250 million to make good its debts in the Banco Ambrosiano affair, so closely connected to the Sindona scandal.

With one glaring exception, the core of the book – the disaster of Franklin itself – is more successful. The tale is as ludicrous as it is convincing: the gullibility and casualness of those who allowed Sindona to capture Franklin through his master company Pasco AG; the personal rivalries among Franklin executives throughout and the crucial enmity which developed between Sindona and Carlo Bordonio, the foreign exchange specialist who would betray him.

Alas, Di Fonzo's million documents do not prevent a serious own goal: his persistent reference to one James Keogh as the Governor of the Bank of England in the early 1970s. Not only that, but this surrogate of the real Sir Leslie O'Brien was entertained to a lavish and closely choreographed dinner at Claridge's, at which Sindona persuaded him to permit Franklin's London branch to deal in foreign exchange. Fact and fancy jostle in every Italian scandal. But this sort of avoidable error – even more than the smaller inaccuracies which dot the Italian editions of St Peter's Banker – undermines good work elsewhere in the book.

This process has come to be known as "rescheduling". As Delamaide rightly puts it:

The whole point of rescheduling... was to keep banks from having to admit that these loans were not being paid off. Banks have to write off loans that are not being repaid... Writing off loans this big could... eat up the equity capital that represents the final barrier to bankruptcy.

But there was an irony in all of this (the "crisis" is full of paradoxes), for as a result of rescheduling the banks were earning higher profits than before. Delamaide notes sarcastically:

In the end the only crisis was whether the banks would be able to increase their quarterly profits. While the banks and the Administration were moaning to legislators about the importance of increasing contributions to the [IMF] the supposedly endangered banks produced a 30 per cent gain in profit.

Nevertheless, since the debtors have avoided being declared bankrupt they will have to find the money at some point. Or equally they might declare themselves in default at some point. Who knows? Are there any alternative policies open?

To those who would prefer a no-nonsense approach to be pursued, William Clark addresses some dire warnings. His *Cataclysm* is a fictionalized account of the events that follow the determined resistance of the Third World countries (he leaves Eastern Europe completely out of the picture) to comply with the insistent demands of the industrialized North, led by the United States and Great Britain, that they either pay up or face the consequences. Upon refusing to do so they are thrown out of the multilateral financial institutions, their assets are impounded, they are disallowed further credit, and all remittances from the North are stopped. Disasters ensue. In the South there is famine and disease; in the North, however, not only the immigrants from the South but also the American blacks identify their interests with those of the South and set about wreaking havoc in the cities. Since so much of our lives depends upon correct computer programs it only takes a small amount of

tampering to bring about utter chaos. After a Wall Street collapse caused by the deliberate feeding of false figures into the satellite, the North is made to see sense, gives way to the demands of the South and attends a reconvened Bretton Woods conference. There a World Central Bank is created in order to ensure a much stronger flow of resources from the North to the South. All's well that ends well – at least so far as this book is concerned. (The author was Vice-President at the World Bank for twelve years). It is very unlikely that many residents of the North would relish such an ending.

Nor would the Western governments. They are hoping for something different: a recovering world economy, a falling interest rate and mounting exports. Darrell Delamaide dismisses such calculations. He quotes with approval a remark made by the managing director of an investment banking firm: "Somehow the conventional wisdom of 200 million South Americans sweating away in the hot sun for the next decade to earn the interest on their debt so Citicorp can raise its dividend twice a year does not square with my image of political reality." Rather insouciantly Delamaide predicts the inevitable writing off of the debts. He declares at the end of his book: "A [Marshall Plan] has... taken place. The transfer of capital came under the guise of bank loans... It was only when the fiction of contractual debt became difficult to maintain... that the resource transfer... emerged as an aid programme." Really? Who decided that the loans were only an aid programme in disguise? Where did all that money go? And if it was a Marshall Plan why have its recipients found it so difficult to meet merely the interest payments?

The reader finds himself forced to ask such questions since neither author gives a thought to the consequences for the West (or the North) from which this enormous transfer of wealth has taken place. The men and women who each day join the ever-lengthening dole queues might tell a different story.

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## Behind the lines

Robert Hewison

It was a stroke of luck that the campaign against the threatened imposition of VAT on books could be carried this week right into the Houses of Parliament with an exhibition of books by MPs and Peers. *Left, Write and Centre: Politicians in Print*. Arranged by the Book Marketing Council some months ago, the exhibition provides a focus for the intense lobbying going on to stop the measure before it starts. Although the budget is not until next March, the campaign has to be won by the end of December.

The campaign, led by the National Book Committee, is now moving into a more public phase, following the submission to the Treasury of a sixteen-page report on the deleterious cultural and economic effects a "tax on reading" would have. The National Book Committee represents all interested parties who must suffer by the tax, but much of the muscle comes from the Publishers' Association; hence the ability to hire two distinguished economists, a public relations firm and a separate firm specializing in advising on legislation, none of whom comes cheap.

While bookshops, libraries and schools are organizing petitions - and everyone is urged to write to their MP - it is evident that the National Book Committee and its advisers are reluctant to stir up a sense of outrage at the prospect of VAT on books. The reason is *realpolitik*: it is hoped that the economic case against the disruption caused for the sake of a mere £85 million will be sufficient in itself, but beyond that, it is thought that the best way of achieving success is to keep politics out of this.

Opposition MPs are eager to make an issue of the tax, but it is feared that this would only produce stubbornness on the part of the government, and oblige Conservative MPs to stay loyal. The campaign has to be won within the ranks of the government's massive majority, so that when they are canvassed by the Whips, they will advise the Chancellor not to go ahead.

We are unlikely, therefore, to hear arguments that the plan for VAT on books shows that the present government would prefer to have an illiterate or ill-informed population; that a tax on reading is consistent with the cuts in education budgets, university spending and student grants; that the decline in the number of public libraries and the shrinking of their book funds is in line with the cuts in the British Council and the Arts Council's retreat from support for literature. In the interest of winning the case, the National Book Committee is delicately removing a banana-skin from the government's path.

This month the blinds were drawn for the last time on the Taranman Gallery in the Brompton Road, and on the career of its owner, Christopher Hewett, who died last December at the age of forty-five. Hewett lived a life so

aesthetic as to be ascetic; his passion for art and literature seemed more appropriate to the 1870s than the 1970s, when ten years ago he opened the gallery with the intention of selling Algerian rugs and pottery from the Tuareg region where he had spent time as a traveller. Contemporary prints, drawings, books, paintings and sculpture quickly superseded the artisanal ware, and the catalogues he produced led to the unfolding of one of the rarest, and least known, late flowers of the fine-book tradition, the Taranman Press.

Hewett's links with that tradition were remarkably close. He was encouraged as a schoolboy by Sir Sydney Cockerell, the friend of Ruskin and secretary to William Morris. He later studied at the Ruskin School of Drawing, and was an intense admirer of Ruskin's work. His printer for all but the first three of his publications was Christopher Skelton, nephew of Eric Gill. His own training in art and architectural draughtsmanship seems to have brought him to the point where his literary and aesthetic interests could only find their expression in the meticulous design of the mere twenty-eight catalogues and six books that he produced.

Because of his appreciation of French literature and connections with France - three of his texts, by Victor Segalen, Pierre Leclerc and Nicolas de Staël are French - where the taste for *livres d'artiste* is stronger than it is here, Christopher Hewett was better known in Paris than in London. He was in line for the award of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres at the time of his unexpected death. With the publication of a memorial catalogue, *Christopher Hewett 1938-1983* (limited edition from the Taranman Press, 0 906499 99 2), the text of an obscure but significant life has been distributed. Carcanet Press has taken over the publication of Hewett's edition of *The Living Church: Letters to W. J. Strachan 1929-1979* (254pp, £14.95, 0 85635 534 8); the Ashmolean Museum is to receive a gift from his collection of sculpture, prints and drawings.

A lone crusade by the author Frederick Nolan to shame publishers into paying royalties on time is developing into a major campaign, now that the Writers' Guild and the Society of Authors have agreed to survey their members on the efficiency - or otherwise - of their publishers' accounts departments. In 1979 Nolan attracted considerable odium from publishers when he announced his personal league table of late payers. Nothing daunted, he announced last month in the *Bookseller* that he was starting another survey, and this time the writers' organizations have swung in behind him.

Frederick Nolan hopes to establish for certain what many authors suspect, that with regard to royalty payments "a lot of publishers are very good, a large number are only adequate, and there is a rearguard who are downright criminal - including some big names in the publishing industry". He has already collected "some hair-raising stories" as a result

of his letter to the *Bookseller*.

The Nolan survey will cover royalty payments for the second half of 1984. All he wishes to know is the name of the publisher, the date for royalty payment in the contract, and the date the payment was made. From the survey a league table will be constructed which could be as controversial and embarrassing as the survey of publishers' contracts conducted by the writers' organizations in 1980. Nolan's first aim is to establish the facts; the long-term aim is to end the three-month delay in payment at the end of the royalty period which, he says, computers have made unnecessary. Writers who do not belong to either the Society of Authors or the Writers' Guild can contact Nolan direct at Highfields, Gorelands Lane, Chalfont St Giles, Bucks.

The Arts Council has decided to adopt a new "corporate identity", ready for the implementation next spring of the development strategy outlined in *The Glory of the Garden*. In other words, it is changing the stationery. In future all Arts Council letters, publicity material and the publicity for every activity which it funds will carry an "arts mark", replacing the current Arts Council logo.

The Secretary-General, Luke Rittner, says that "the new identity we have is more positive" and the design is part of "a total rationalization of everything that comes out of this organization". Rittner was talking about the writing-paper, but the Arts Council is also conducting a major internal review that will have consequences as far-reaching as the policies initiated by the development strategy.

A management consultant is thoroughly examining the Council's administrative procedures; his recommendations could lead to major changes in the present structure of departments and their advisory panels. There is speculation that the present system of separate panels for each discipline will be abandoned. At the same time, the Arts Council is considering giving up the forty-year-old system of "deficit funding", by which clients are guaranteed against loss, but are unable to retain any surplus. The effect of this system has been to guarantee that clients make a loss, rather than guarantee them against one. Luke Rittner has himself said that the system rewards bad management. In future, it is proposed that clients should be allowed to retain their surplus - but they will be unable to expect additional help if they get into trouble.

The Arts Council's new management system - and possibly the revised funding procedures - are expected to be in place by next April. The "arts mark" is already beginning to appear. The Arts Council will not, however, be abandoning the use of "Century" type-face for its printed communications. "This serifed face," says Nick Jenkins, the arts mark designer, "has a certain dignity without being 'stuffy' and has a classicism which counterpoints the linear mark." So that's what they mean by "corporate identity".

suggestive of a state of mortality. It was this, I conceive, which led to the Shade's being advised by the gallery to "turn over!" - a recommendation which it took extremely ill.

3 "If you are not afraid of the devil, I can't help it; but to be sure it is natural to be surprised at such things, though I know there is nothing in them: not that it was the ghost that surprised me neither; for I should have known that to have been only a man in a strange dress: but when I saw that little man so frightened himself, it was that which took hold of me."

Competition No 196  
Winners: A. L. Manhood  
Answers:

1 By spending three-pence in a coffee-house, he might be for some hours every day in very good company; he might dine for six-pence, breakfast on bread and milk for a penny, and do without supper. On clean-shirt-day he went abroad, and paid visits. James Bowen, *Life of Johnson*, Aesop 28.

2 "Have you got a clean shirt?" he asked Tilly. "Oh, now you've got clean shirts," she said, "I'm wearing a white one." Tilly brought down one of the clean shirts he had hidden away, and then, putting it before him to air

at the fire.  
D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, chapter 1.

3 "It was in this year that my uncle began to break in upon the regularity of a clean shirt" (*Tristram Shandy*). To-day for the first time in history I put on yesterday's shirt.  
James Agate, diary, 3. x. 1939.

Applications are invited for the 1984 George Devine Award, founded in memory of the first artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre. It is open to all playwrights and will be in the region of £2,000; the selection committee will include John Dexter, David Gothard, Harold Pinter, Caryl Churchill, Saeed Wilson and Jocelyn Herbert. Applicants should write to Christine Smith, George Devine Award, 23 Ainger Road, London NW3 (tel: 01 722 3188) giving an outline of their work. Submissions of plays, which must be received by January 31, 1985, should be made in duplicate, with s.c. and only plays for the stage, whether or not they have been produced, are eligible.

## CHILDREN'S BOOKS

### Recommended reading for the Reich

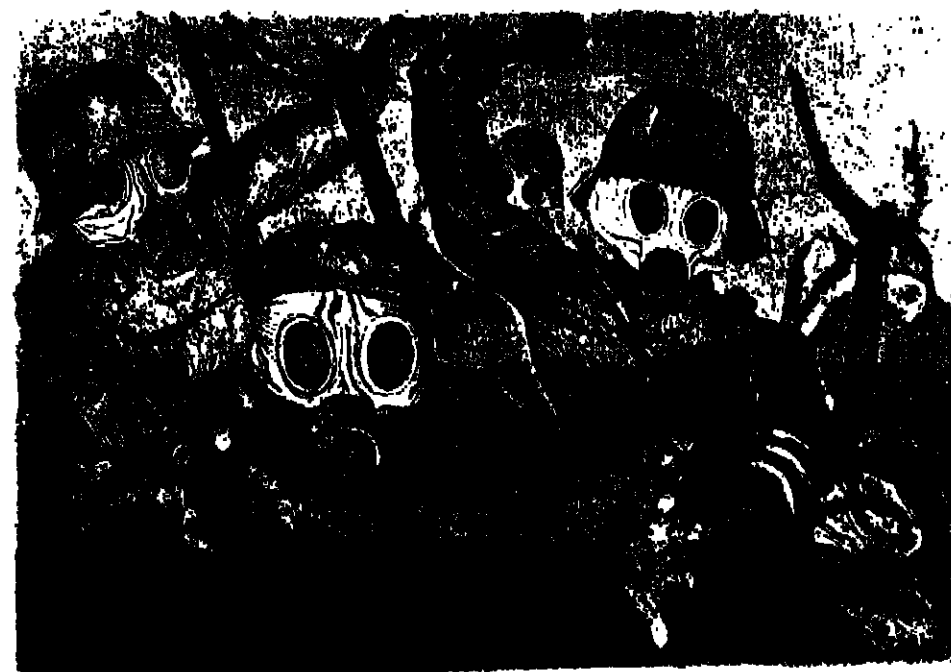
Gordon A. Craig

CHRISTA KAMENETSKY  
*Children's Literature in Hitler's Germany: The cultural policy of National Socialism* 399pp. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. £32.95. 08214 0699 X

Long before his assumption of power, Hitler was resolved, as passages in *Mein Kampf* and his speeches make clear, to correct what he once called "the criminal idiocies" of the Weimar system by means of a total reform of education from the *Volksschule* to the university, a reform in which, Peter Stachura has written, "formal instruction, the acquisition of scientific and objective knowledge, and the cultivation of the spirit would all be relegated to an inferior position in the scale of . . . educational priorities", and emphasis would be placed rather upon such things as the duties of the individual to the state and the imperatives of racial awareness and upon character-building and physical training.

Even so, neither Hitler nor those who set out to implement his ideas, for all their arrogant anti-intellectualism and their insistence that the deed was more important than the word, could get around the fact that, in a highly literate society, books were central to the educational enterprise, and the book-burnings of May 1933 attested to their acknowledgement of the power of the printed page. The young academicians who fed the bonfires in Berlin, Cologne, Bonn, Frankfurt, Munich, Nuremberg and Würzburg did not condemn books as such but rather criticized those that they considered to be the flames as evil books, which had "defiled German history and degraded the great German heroes of the past", or created "a folk-allen journalism of the democratic or Jewish type", or "crippled the German language", or showed "a lack of respect for the German folk soul". Implicit in these windy exercises was the assumption that a cleansed and reformed literature would be of central importance in the building of the Third Reich, and this assumption was shared by all of those educationalists and administrators who in the years that followed sought to identify or supply the right kind of books and to encourage Germans to read them.

Of particular importance to them were the books that would be read by German youth, whom Hitler described in 1933 as "the living guarantors of Germany . . . the Germany of the future". Children's literature had, of course, always been a subject of intense interest to German cultural critics, and well before the First World War people who shared the anti-modernist, anti-rationalist, anti-urban, anti-industrial biases of Paul de Lagarde and Julius Langbehn were beginning to agitate for a greater emphasis, in the books



"Stormtroops advance under gas" by Otto Dix, part of a cycle of fifty etchings on the subject of war published in 1924. The illustration is taken from *The Print in Germany 1880-1933: The age of Expressionism* by Frances Carey and Antony Griffiths (272pp, British Museum Publications. Paperback £12.95. 07141 1621 1).

that young people read at home and in school, upon ethnicity and the community, upon the values of the countryside rather than those of the city, and upon the specifically German past rather than the customs and history of other peoples.

By the turn of the century, the so-called German Art Education Movement in Hamburg was urging the revival of folklore and folk art in school curricula as a means of combating the fragmentation of modern life, and this movement gained in strength and determination after the collapse of 1918 and the coming of the Weimar Republic, whose cultural modernism and zeal for experimentation made some Germans conclude that Thomas Mann's tears, in *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*, of the triumph of western civilization over the various *Völkisch* groups that began to proliferate in the 1920s were generally agreed that the educational system was sadly deficient in recognizing its responsibility for promoting a sense of national identification and loyalty among students, and as the first step toward correcting this they called for reading programmes that would, from elementary grades onward, be filled with concentrated doses of German and Nordic-Germanic folktales, myths and legends, with excerpts from medieval chapbooks, and with regional tales and ballads.

If it is true then - as Christa Kamenetsky writes in the preface to this book - that "in children's literature the Nazis perceived one of their most important tools for re-educating children in the spirit of National Socialism", they were not required to strike out on their

own or, in the first instance, to create the kind of literature that would promote their goals. While they went about the job of removing from school curricula and the shelves of school and public libraries books that were "folk-alien" or "decadent", or appeared to promote Bolshevism, liberalism or internationalism, or were written by pacifists or Jews, they could fill the gaps with new editions of works for younger readers that had appeared during the Weimar period - Severin Röttgers's *Blame Bändchen* and *Quellen* of German folklore, Leopold Weber's children's books on Norse sagas, Theodor Seldenfaden's *Heldenbuch*, Will Vesper's version of the *Nibelungenlied* - as well as collections of excerpts from the works of such *Völkisch* writers and agrarian romanticists as Adolf Bartels (*Volk wider Volk*), Hermann Burff (*Wiltfeber der ewige Deutscher*), Gustav Frenssen (*Jörn Uhl*), Hermann Stehr (*Der Helligenhof*), Hermann Löns (*Der Wehrwolf*), and the regional tales of Hans Friedrich Blunck. In a general way, such works were in accordance with Nazi cultural ideas, and from the standpoint of quality they were better than anything that Nazi writers could immediately provide.

Even so, reliance upon the older works was at best a temporary solution, for, as Kamenetsky points out, they were not specific enough in their advocacy of National Socialist principles to satisfy for long. Thus, a leading Nazi educational theorist, Ernst Krieck, argued that folklore itself would have to be transformed into a "total and politically oriented science . . . in order to meet present-day standards". The comparative dimension that had marked the work of Herder and the

Grimms, and their willingness to think of humanity at large, must give way to an emphasis upon the specifically German folk community, and folklore and saga must be made to serve as a kind of political science for contemporary Germans, being interpreted in such a way as to demonstrate that the Nazis, in their insistence upon racial purity, their heroic attitude towards life, their belief in the leadership principle, their devotion to the soil, and their lust for expansion were continuing and fulfilling the ideals of the peasant-warriors who were their remote forbears.

The historical and peasant novels of the older *Völkisch* literature would be subjected to similarly political and present-oriented interpretation. To make sure that this was done, Kamenetsky writes, "the Party and State censorship authorities would issue detailed 'guidelines' for teachers, librarians and youth leaders. In addition, all editors of folklore journals and literature journals were placed under pressure to follow the National Socialist ideology in [their] interpretation and criticism. . . . Those who did not . . . were denied paper for printing or were ordered to cease publishing altogether."

This grandiose experiment in cultural engineering was beset from the start with difficulties, not all of which Kamenetsky fully appreciates. Her account of the zeal with which the Nazi theorists went about the task of forcing the rich literature of folklore and saga upon the procrustean bed of ideology - reducing Odin from a god of many roles to "the archetype of an authoritarian leader who accepted war as a final challenge to his pride and honor", in short, an earlier version of Adolf Hitler, and transforming Thor from a god of thunder to a fighting peasant defending German settlements at home and abroad - is always interesting and often amusing. So is her description of the earnestness with which *Völkisch* pedagogues combed through Nordic sagas in an effort to find an ethics conformable to Nazi ideas and illustrative tales that would justify their own brutal values (one of them declaring solemnly, "Our life in Germany today is based on a deep faith in the values of the National Socialist ideology, namely, those of blood and soil, honour and loyalty. . . . We should reach the point where nobody dares talk about these Germanic values without having consulted the Icelandic sagas"), and their awkward attempts to find ways of making such perennial children's favourites as *Heidi*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "useful" for German folk education by means of deletions and ideological re-touching. Her chapters on Nazi attempts to create a new children's literature, beginning with primers, picture books and readers, on school libraries, and on the system of censorship are circumstantial and rewarding.

Yet, despite all of this, there is more in this book about theory and plans than there is about

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out accomplishment, and Kamentsky's sometimes excessive quotations from Nazi educationists leave us wondering what effect all this talk about reform had upon the educational system as such. Virtually nothing is said here about three factors that were important in this respect.

The first was the resistance of the schools themselves to the often half-baked ideas of Nazi educational reformers. German schools, both elementary and secondary, had a long tradition of excellence, and it is not to be supposed that teachers and principals simply caved in to Party pressure to revise their curricula and reading lists, particularly in the *Gymnasien* and the Roman Catholic schools. In his memoir, *What Is To Become of the Boy?* Heinrich Böll leaves the impression that his *Gymnasium* in Cologne was virtually untouched by Nazi influence as late as 1936-7, and tells us that its faculty included a teacher who taught literary style by having students reduce any four or five pages of *Mein Kampf* to two or less, and others who read with their classes *Antigone* and the satires of Juvenal, exercises hardly conducive to loyalty to National Socialism. Presumably there was less of this sort of thing in the *Volkschulen*, but it is unlikely that there was no resistance at all.

The second factor was the bureaucratic one. In her chapter on school libraries, Kamentsky cites a progress report issued by the Minister of Education in 1938 which listed among recent accomplishments the establishment of a Central Reich Office for Folk Libraries, the founding of forty-three state offices for folk libraries; the reorganization or founding of 5,000 folk libraries, the compilation and distribution of basic book lists for all folk libraries, and the cooperation of these libraries with the Hitler Youth Organization on behalf of youth libraries. It is hard to contemplate this list of particulars without having visions of endless committee meetings and oceans of memoranda and without suspecting that the cultural policy of Nazi Germany was always on the verge of becoming little more than a gigantic boondoggle in which the original goals became muddled and obscure.

Finally, cultural policy was always affected by the continual and bitter infighting between State and Party agencies that was characteristic of the Nazi régime, and what went on in the schools was not exempt from this conflict of warring interests. If the Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung claimed overall responsibility for laying down norms for the separate states to follow, its au-

thority was challenged from the outset by the Hitlerjugend, whose assigned duty was "to educate German youth physically, spiritually, and morally in the spirit of National Socialism for service to the folk and the folk community" and which interpreted that to mean that it had a right of surveillance over teachers and teaching methods. At various times, the Ministries of Propaganda and the Interior, the SA, the Wehrmacht and the German Labour Front intervened in educational matters, and Goebbels and Rosenberg, Bormann and Frick fought duels of competence. Toleration of this kind of rivalry was an essential part of Hitler's system of government, and he was little inclined to listen to the complaints of Minister of Education Bernhard Rust against invasions of his sphere of responsibility by mental lightweights like the HJ leader Baldur von Schirach.

The fact was that Hitler never regarded anything that went on in the classroom seriously, saying in August 1942, "Lucky are those who have the happy knack of being able to forget most of what they have been taught. Those who cannot forget are ripe to become professors - a race apart. And that is not intended as a compliment." Against Rust, whom he considered to be just another pedant, Hitler could always be counted upon to support Schirach,

who, as a failed academic with a deep resentment against the educational establishment, was congenial to him and whose emphasis upon character training by route marches and physical jerks he approved. It is no wonder, therefore, that Rust's Basic List of Recommended Books for school libraries and his Reich Readers for various grade levels were not ready until 1937 and that basic reform of the reading plans for elementary and high schools was still in embryonic state. Even after 1937, the regulations affecting recommended reading were, Professor Kamentsky admits, filled with ambiguities and, once the war started, "were not as thoroughly implemented as had been planned."

Even if they had been, the effects would very likely have been mixed. After December 1936, when membership in the HJ became obligatory for all young Germans between the ages of ten and eighteen, school authorities complained constantly that Schirach's programme of marches, exercises and weekend expeditions demanded so much of their students' time and energies that they could not perform normal classroom assignments adequately, let alone read books at home. In these circumstances, the nature of children's literature became a matter of no essential importance.

## The child in the book

### Margaret Meek

JACQUELINE ROSE

*The Case of Peter Pan: Or the impossibility of children's fiction*  
181pp. Macmillan. £17.50, (paperback, £6.95). 0333 319753

Jacqueline Rose chooses to explore the always uncertain territory of children's literature by analysing both the text and the various spin-offs of *Peter Pan* and in doing so she has produced a general treatise which will be of interest to all who are concerned with children's books for children has tended either to avoid or dismiss as obvious. She invites us to consider the myth of the child which adults, for one reason or another, need to keep inviolate. Rose shakes us into an awareness that children's books, far from being simple, are as ambiguous as their adult counterparts. She asks the question: what are adults up to when they write for or about children?

Behind the concept of children's fiction Rose discovers a fantasy that "there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple". She suggests that children's literature rarely speaks of the relationship of children and adults, except in ways which adults, as writers, publishers, and givers of children's books, determine:

To say that the child is inside the book - children's books as often as not are about children - is to fall straight into a trap. It is to confuse the adult's intention to get at the child with the child's intention to get at the adult. In the production of children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp.

*Peter Pan*, says Rose, "has never in any easy

way, been a book for children at all, but the question it throws back to me is whether there can be any such thing".

To make her case that children's fiction is not what adults claim for it, Rose examines the origin and literary history of *Peter Pan*. It was first a tale told to a child within Barrie's adult novel, *The Little White Bird*. The relation of the narrator to the child is clearly a sexual one. It illustrates "the impossible questions - about origins and sexual difference", around which the writing of the book "gravitates and stalls". Later, as a play, which rescued the failing fortunes of the theatre of its day, and as *Peter and Wendy*, a children's book, *Peter Pan* keeps "the residual forms of disturbance which are at the heart of the narrative itself". In each of its appearances *Peter Pan* is a special case of parapraxis; the author reveals more than he means.

Rose argues that the impossibility of children's fiction is rooted in the relationship of teller and the told. The strongest thrust of her Freudian exposition of the relationship of child and adult in the writing and reading of children's books is that we ignore both the sexuality implicit in the relationship and the notoriously deceiving and concealing functions of language. After Bettelheim we may be disposed to believe that fairy stories have a settling and calming effect on the disturbances of childhood. At the same time we know that they mean more than they say. Yet we expect children to understand them intuitively as stabilizing influences rather than representations of their inner conflicts. In the production of "realistic" stories for children, adults devise worlds where children, as characters and readers, are to encounter nature directly. In the

stories of Alan Garner, for example, the innocence of the child meets the "reality" of rural life. Children's literature perpetuates the Rousseauist myth that cultural decadence can be redeemed by the child.

Alongside these ambiguities Dr Rose sets the history of *Peter Pan* as a history of the adult investment in the child. *Peter Pan* makes money, not least for the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children, and this is another cultural paradox. We have to remember that the children's book is no different from other aspects of our literary culture, which are governed by trade and exploitation. *Peter Pan*, like *Peter Rabbit*, also belongs to the makers of pottery and pictures. If we see archetypal characters simply as symbols of the literary truth of childhood, we "perpetuate the fundamental blindness - to the contradictions and difficulties which more urgently need to be addressed in relation to how our culture constitutes and reproduces its image of the child".

The most significant way in which our culture pins down children is in language: the language they speak and the language they have to learn to read. Our children have not a

common literacy nor a common access to literature (and here Dr Rose is critical of the Bullock Report's assumptions that the language of children's literature can overcome the social divisiveness in our culture). To become a school text in 1912 *Peter and Wendy* had to be purged of Barrie's "literariness" an operation still performed on children's books whenever the intended readers, in the view of those adults who provide books in school (and are therefore outside the relation of author to reader), are unable to read what they ought to be reading.

Dr Rose's searching arguments are complex and concentrated. This is the book children's literature has needed for some time. It combines scholarly examination of primary sources with historical commentary, the social history of childhood and critical theory derived from psychoanalysis. In so far as *Peter Pan* is a "case", it is a challenge to critics to examine the whole range of cultural practices attached to stories for children, including the one which Dr. Rose says least about, the interaction of the children - real children, not simply the adult idealized version - and the text.

## Home help

### Carol Fox

JIM TRELEASE

*The Read-Aloud Handbook*  
237pp. Penguin. Paperback, £2.50. 0140070494

Once upon a time reading aloud was something parents did for young children in the stage before reading independence. Teachers saw it as a beneficial and relatively uncomplicated activity in which parents might back up learning to read at school without encroaching upon the teacher's territory. By the time fluent, silent reading was established, the bedtime ritual was over and childish things put away.

In recent years there has been a revolution in our thinking about this rather ordinary activity, a revolution fired by a concern for the fate of non-readers in a literate culture, and fuelled by research findings from a variety of disciplines - linguistics, psychology, education and ethnography among them. We now know that the regular and early experience of books read aloud is the cornerstone of later educational success; children whose parents read to them become good readers themselves and do well in school. This recent focus on reading aloud is also part of a broader, and, in many ways less utilitarian, movement, a movement which respects the expert knowledge of parents about their own children, which values the home as a place where learning is accomplished naturally and pleasurably, and which ascribes to child-

with literature. Reading aloud to children is not a means to the end of fluent reading, though that is usually an important consequence of it, but an end in itself. It is no longer merely a stage of learning to read, as Jim Trelease testifies when he recommends it as much for teenage and adult fluent readers as for pre-literate children.

Much of the book is a battleground from which he fires salvo after salvo at what he sees as the chief enemy of American literacy - television. According to research findings quoted in the book there is a significant correlation between pupils' performance in examinations and the number of hours spent watching television, a correlation which holds true regardless of social class background, IQ, or study routines. Whether or not the case is proved, whether or not American television is more damaging to children than its English counterpart, there are some awesome statistics.

Many readers will question some of Trelease's conclusions (on television's influence on language, for example) and it would be a pity if Trelease's tendency to overstate his case blinded readers to his book's enormous and unique usefulness. The book is bursting with well-thought-out and practised ideas, advice on which books "lead themselves to reading aloud, and why, right through the age range, advice on the performance of reading aloud, on home, class, and school libraries. Nearly a hundred pages are devoted to a "Treasury of Read-Alouds" - adapted for use

## Prophecy and paradox

### Sarah Hayes

ROBERT WESTALL  
*The Cats of Serostor*  
278pp. Macmillan. £6.95. 0333 375491.1

Robert Westall's new novel is a historical fantasy. Part medieval derring-do, part allegory, part dream, it is aimed at only the most sophisticated teenager though most readers will find the second reading more rewarding than the first. There are too many narrative threads to follow and too many implications to absorb. Even the leitmotifs are circular: a path which leads onwards and always arrives in the same place; a knife that deals certain death yet confers immortality on its owner; a prophecy which is fulfilled in its overthrowing. Paradoxes prop up the structure of the novel like the impossible pillars of an Escher tower.

The cats are at the centre of the book (though this is not a novel for ordinary cat-lovers). The Miw are a race of purebred golden cats twice the size and three times the weight of normal cats. They communicate via mind-speech, sending out thoughts and images and a variety of memories. Direct speech is eschewed, apart from the odd purr or prook laid on for lesser species. Humans (a lesser species) fear and respect the Miw: man is honoured when a Miw deigns to sit on his lap, but glad when it chooses to get off. These supercats have that sense of infinite superiority possessed by all ancient civilizations. Beside them, human beings appear petty, quarrelsome, and confused.

People at war are humans at their most pet-

ty, or so it seems in Westall's unsavoury fourteenth-century French city rife with civil unrest. A feverish atmosphere hangs about the place - a little corruption here, a little aggression there, a knife in the dark, a sudden burst of light, a big bang. The city (unnamed but based on Les Baux) is a walled ducal state perched high on a rocky outcrop. The duke is murdered in front of his young son, who is then spirited away by the Miw. The young duke is taken over, mentally and spiritually, by the ancient guardians of the city. Outside the city, some way away, Cam, the official human hero, and a wandering fixer, takes over the ownership of a magic knife, thus releasing its former owner to the death he craves. The knife leads Cam inexorably towards the city, carrying with it a message for the mysterious "Serostor" or legendary saviour. As the city deteriorates into lawlessness, Cam is unable to resist assuming the mantle of the Serostor and he eventually leads the people against the usurper. And always the cats are there, manipulating thoughts, elements, and actions. That peculiarly feline combination of aloofness, dignity, and ability to please, penetrates the darker recesses of human behaviour.

This is a rich, violent, sombre novel, enlivened, like a medieval painting, by the occasional inappropriate grotesque. Robert Westall has never patronized his readers; here, with his daring unconnected sentences, constant shifting of scene, and teasing allusions he makes it positively difficult. Perhaps a generation reared on three-dimensional puzzles and micro games will find the effort less painful than their elders. Both should find the effort rewarding.

## A home front

### Peter Blake

RACHEL ANDERSON  
*The War Orphan*  
Oxford University Press, £6.95. 019271496

Rachel Anderson has written a war novel for and about adolescents that, like much of modern children's fiction, is both different from and better than what we were once used to. Once upon a time fiction of this sort typically involved Jerry getting his just deserts, and war children tended to be fledgling guerrillas who came through unbloodied and unbowed. *The War Orphan*, however, shows war as inglorious and children of war as victims not victors.

The war here is the Vietnam war, literally brought home to the narrator Simon by Ha, a Vietnamese orphan whom Simon's parents decide to foster. Simon's mother is splendidly confident that all Ha needs is love, and even Simon looks benignly on the challenge of this emotionally broken sibling. But Ha does not turn out to be the expected accommodating pet. (Indeed, he soon kills the family's pet, burying it from a top-floor window.) Ha can barely stand, he cannot speak, he cannot feed himself, and he is incontinent. Slowly the family collapses before Ha's onslaught. Simon first runs away and later attempts suicide. As a result, the authorities take Ha back into professional care.

The removal of Ha, however, does not restore the family's comfortable status quo ante, and Simon demands his return. For unlike his running away, Simon's suicide attempt was not a protest but an act of self-sacrifice on Ha's behalf. "After the cat I'd thought to rid our family of Ha. I'd failed. I'd got it all wrong. It was myself who had to go." In between the protest and the sacrifice, Simon has learnt about Ha's past and Ha's war, not as he had expected through research in the library, but in his dreams. Nightly the harrowing story of Ha's past - the disruption of his village; the internment of the family; the death of his sister (starved), his mother (shot), and his father (blown up); and Ha's arrival, mute and insensate in a war hospital - occupies Simon's sleep.

At first the cross-cutting and intertwining of Simon's waking life and his night-time dreams of Ha are confusing. But gradually the reader (like Simon) is eager for more dreams, because they clarify Ha's past. This narrative form is obviously complex, but then so is the subject.

and so must be the reader's response. And Ha's compelling story and Simon's part in it have a cumulative momentum that overcomes most objections.


Anderson is ambitious, but she is not wholly successful: a pervasive naivety undercuts the novel. Long strings of simple paratactic sentences condescend to the reader and detract from the complexity of the structure. And while looking for our sympathy for Ha and Simon, Anderson renders all the other characters wholly unsympathetic. The parents are stereotypical middle-class liberals, the social worker talks in predictable psychobabble, and the headmaster could have been drawn by Molesworth. The portrayal of the GIs in Vietnam is particularly crude. They are either brutal or innocent, and the brutal ones are all inept Lt Calleys looking for their own My Lai and talking in the hardbitten patois found in the sort of *Boy's Own* fiction that *The War Orphan* is intended to replace.

The eighteen brief tales which make up *Stories for Lesley* by Robert Frost (77pp. \$14.95. University Press of Virginia. 0 8139 0979 1) have never before been published as a collection. The dedicatee is the author's daughter and the stories were written and read to her at the turn of the century, several years before Frost's first mature work in poetry, *North of Boston* (1914). The flavour of that book - rendered through what Norman Douglas called "an image of things really heard and seen" - is anticipated by *Stories for Lesley*, even although, intriguingly, Frost's first book of poems, *A Boy's Will*, published the year before, was characterized by a late Victorian tone.

Some of these stories are very short indeed. Here is "Picking Raspberries" in full: When I went out to the raspberry patch to pick berries one day I got on the wrong side of a rabbit. The poor little fellow couldn't get home because I was in the way. He had to hide all I got through was in the way. He had to tell you where I was. He trembled as if it was winter; but it was only raspberry time. He had to play there two weeks.

Roger D. Sell has added ten pages of editorial notes, describing the notebook, listing the alterations which Frost made to it, detailing the sequence of the leaves, etc. These rather give the game away: this volume, prettily illustrated by Warren Chappell, is more likely to excite scholars than children.

James Campbell



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# The unsuspecting author

Edward Blishen

ROALD DAHL  
Boy  
160pp. Cape. £6.50.  
0 2240 2985 1

How does Roald Dahl catch the attention, as he so singularly does? One of the answers is to be found on the first page of this account of his childhood and youth, addressed to children. He enters his own books briskly, with a succession of stinging sentences, and an air of bringing all sorts of nonsense to an end. In this case he assures the reader that he is not writing an autobiography ("usually full of . . . boring details"). He is simply setting down a number of unforgettable memories, some funny, some painful, some unpleasant. We may reflect that this sounds not at all unlike autobiography; but we read on, feeling both mysteriously guilty and curiously braced.

He has the gift of exhilarating, but often – and here, very often – using what, in other hands, would be depressing material. There are many beatings and other cruelties. At his first school, one of these followed from The Great Mouse Plot. This was in Llandaff in 1923. The sweetshop was owned by Mrs

Pratchett, "a small skinny old hag with a moustache on her upper lip". (One of the reasons for his power over young readers, I suspect, is that he still discusses his villains in terms of boyish distaste.) The author and two friends put a dead mouse in one of her jars of sweets. The result was a tremendous caning. Mrs Pratchett seems (astonishingly) to have been present, "bounding up and down with excitement" in one of the headmaster's big leather armchairs and shrieking: "Lay it into 'im! Lay it into 'ave it! Teach 'im a lesson!" It is like a scene from one of Dahl's stories. Later there was Dr Fisher at Repton: "If someone had told me that this flogging clergyman was one day to become the Archbishop of Canterbury, I would never have believed it." Dahl is not against caning itself – understood as "a few quick sharp tickles" – but one sees in these memories the origin of much of his fiction, in which the cruel reap a harvest of cruelty. In between the beatings there was a matron, a variation on Mrs Pratchett (she was known, says the author, to listen "with a funny look on her face for the crack . . . crack . . . crack of the cane" coming from the headmaster's study), who is remembered for dropping soap into the mouth of a snoring child. There is an account of an adenoids operation conducted on the unsuspecting author without an anaesthetic.

Happiness was being at home. Dahl writes interesting about having his existence divided between Norway and Britain, and lovingly about his mother, who was obedient to her husband's theory that going on "glorious walks" could furnish an unborn child with a sense of beauty. His father died at the age of fifty-three, leaving Mrs Dahl determined to act on his wish that the children should go to school in Britain. None of the schools was particularly nice. In one, "all grown-ups were dangerous creatures". The young Dahl ("Boy" to his family) discovered in which direction he was to go, and "never went to sleep with my back to my family". "Unless you have been to boarding school when you were very young", he writes, "it is absolutely impossible to appreciate the delights of living at home." He claims he went to Repton because he was in-

## Out of place

Sylvia Clayton

CHRISTOPHER LEACH  
River Run  
215pp. Dent. £8.95.  
0460 04652 5

Christopher Leach, recalling in an autobiographical novel intended for "young adults" his boyhood in London's dockland and his brief experience of country life as a wartime evacuee in Somerset, has achieved a sharp-edged portrait of the artist as a young misfit. His childhood was full of tripwires; his father, who delivered packing-cases from a two-horse dray, had been mentally and physically shattered as a soldier in the First World War and was a drinker of uncertain temper. His mother, concerned but undemonstrative, was always under stress, especially when the father died, leaving her with four young children. Uneasy at home, Christopher was insecure at school and invented a millionaire uncle who was going to carry him away for marvellous treats aboard his yacht. When the chance of leaving Poplar did come, since his school was evacuated to the West country, Christopher ended up in the household of a fiercely evangelical spinster, where he felt more out of place than ever.

All this is described in the polished, craftsmanlike prose of someone who cares about euphony and will not tolerate a slovenly sentence. What is missing from the book, however, is that kind of inner consonance, which enables the writer to enter into the skin of his childhood. The gap between the rueful boy and the writer of measured sentences is seldom bridged.

## Earlier echoes

Nicole Irving

GENE KEMP  
The Well  
90pp. Faber. £4.95.  
0 571 13284 7

Gene Kemp's books, especially the Tawfworth Pig stories, provide a mixture of realism and fantasy which is so homogenous that the lively stories seem to be the reader's own. The stories are recognizable; normal world of the child characters ends and where the extraordinary other world with its animate toys and friendly, talking pigs begins. This kind of make-believe world is itself familiar; what is unusual is the entirely unobtrusive blurring of the frontiers, so that we suddenly find ourselves in the world of talking animals, believing in it. In this way children are compelled to ask questions which may appear naïve (But surely, pigs cannot talk? Is the little boy dreaming this?), but which are important questions about the nature of "reality" and the ways in which stories are told.

In her latest book, *The Well*, Gene Kemp reveals the source of her gift. This is the autobiographical story of Anne Sutton, alias Gene Kemp, when, as a little girl around 1935, she lived in the Midlands – an evocation in which many echoes from earlier works will be heard. It is the portrait of a real childhood rather than

vented to choose between that school and Marlborough, and Repton "was an easier word to say". The best thing about Repton, young devotees of Dahl's fiction will note, was the testing and tasting of chocolate the boys were invited to undertake for Cadbury's. To his own surprise, he was Captain of Fives and also of Squash-rackets, but was perhaps the only Captain of any game never to be made a Boazer, a sort of prefect. ("I did not like rules. I was unpredictable.") Characteristically, he turned down the idea of going to university, preferring to work for some company that would send him to a remote country like China or Africa. Africa it was: chosen largely because he had been told that if you were bitten by a black mamba, you died within the hour "with itching in agony and foaming at the mouth". "I couldn't wait", says Mr Dahl.

Growth, Leach observes, comes through fear or love. He is right to put the emotions in that order, for it is the shocks that his imagination suffered which animate his writing most strongly. As a small boy he watched the raising of a drowned man from the canal.

"His left hand came first, very clean and white, at the same angle to the sun, seeming to rest upon it for a second. Then the sodden clothes came, the soaked glittering shoulder, and then the face. Sick-baited, it was green like the water and continued to the wall disturbed in a transformation. The closed quality of that face silenced us all . . . But for nights thereafter the face stared back at me, silent, with open eyes."

His mother, fiercely honest in her poverty, was determined that her son should maintain her own standards of truthfulness. In one of the book's most vivid episodes the author describes how he played truant to avoid a maths exam and then lied to his mother about it. She promptly took him back to school and insisted that the headmaster should come him at once, in her presence. "I was nine years old and had been betrayed. It took years to tell me it was by love." It is after his failure to produce for his two school friends the millionaire uncle of his dreams that Christopher identifies himself as a solitary. "It was then that I realised that I was essentially a loner; happy to be with others for a day, or an afternoon, but happier alone."

There are many clear, telling images in the book. It is a pity Leach sometimes labours his metaphors, seeing himself on a bicycle as "an exiled prince returning to his kingdom" and a drink of orange juice as a libation. He seems then under pressure to prove that his childhood was unique. He has already shown its distinctiveness and I hope he will continue the story.

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## Stopping short

Alan Brownjohn

The six little books in Heinemann's new Banana Books series are brightly coloured, handy, durable – and curiously short. They are intended for seven to nine-year-olds; but the seven might already be expecting something a bit larger in size, while the nines would surely be graduating to lengthier volumes altogether. The vocabulary of the books is by no means ill-judged (they are not for slow readers), so there would seem to have been a miscalculation. The six authors certainly betray signs of uncertainty about how much ground they would be expected to cover in around 4,000 words, with the knowledge that their stories would be fully illustrated. Are they to go for a very short novel, or for a plain short story?

There are three indisputable short stories among the six: brief tales (anecdotes almost) based on one simple idea which is developed in a quick and obvious manner and finished off with a two-easy twist in the plotting. Andrew in Judy Blume's *Freckle Juice* wishes he had a face covered with freckles, and pays a classmate a dollar for a secret freckle recipe. It makes him violently sick when he mixes the ingredients, and it does not have the desired effect. When he covers his face with blue freckles (made with a blue marker) his kindly teacher persuades him to wash them off. End of book. Kelly, in Sheila Lavelle's *The Big Slink*, takes revenge on his unsympathetic teacher by snailing a decaying kipper under her desk. The smell closes down the school. Kelly is stricken with guilt, and creeps in at night to remove the fish – only to catch two teenage burglars who are removing the sports cups. Both of these stories are sadly casual and obvious, flimsy tales of the beguiling tricks children are thought to get up to by sentimental adults.

Penelope Lively's fable of two dragons which hatch out of strange eggs bought on a market stall is also no more than a short story, but told with a credibility and delicacy which almost manages to conceal its slightness. The eggs are Peter's gift to his grandfather, but the boy and the old man are not sure what to do with two growing dragons who eat fish fingers, breathe fire through the wire netting of their hutch, and attract the attention of the Pest Control Officer. How to get rid of them is Mrs Lively's problem as much as her characters'. Well, as they eat fish they might be sea-dragons; and indeed, after a little practice they fly out over the sea and away into the sunset.

In *Jane and the Pirates* Jules Older has written a novel of a kind, solving the problem posed by necessary brevity by resorting to speed of action. Each tiny, fast-moving chapter ends with an injunction to turn the page: "Jane escaped this time, but will she be so lucky the next time? Read Chapter Eight – and find out!" This helps to make the book seem longer than it is; yet the plot is banal and the characterization ordinary. Captain Redbeard is a commonplace villain, despite Michael Bragg's attempts, with his fastidious drawings, to en-

hance his size and frightfulness by making the captured Jane diminutive and pitiful. Jeremy Ford, the illustrator of Douglas Hill's science fiction fantasy, is given more scope; though the knowledge that these *Moon Monsters* are harmless beings draws him in the direction of Sendak's wild things. Hill's creatures are, in fact, computer-controlled inventions, devised to allow their makers to enjoy the pleasures of hunting without killing anything. This is an agreeable fantasy, and a neatly presented message. Yet the writing is disappointingly slack – the idea deserved better than the tired effects of routine space fiction.

Exceptionally precise and subtle illustrations (by Charlotte Voake) help considerably in the case of the one genuine success of the six: Emma Tennant's *The Ghost Child*. Tennant accepts the challenge of writing a miniature novel, pacing the narrative skilfully and including enough clever yet unobtrusive detail to suggest that a lot of things are happening. Melly joins her grandparents in the country for her usual summer stay. But this time a mystery door opens up in a wall of the house, and a friendly ghost appears, to haunt her in two guises. The ending offers a sudden sentimental conclusion just when it seemed the narrative could have developed into something altogether longer and richer. *The Ghost Child* has done its ingenious best with the quota of words allowed it.

Judy Blume: *Freckle Juice*. Illustrated by Coral Guppy. 0 434 93021 7.  
Sheila Lavelle: *The Big Slink*. Illustrated by Lisa Kopper. 0 434 93023 7.  
Penelope Lively: *Dragon Trouble*. Illustrated by Valerie Littlewood. 0 434 93022 9.  
Jules Older: *Jane and the Pirates*. Illustrated by Michael Bragg. 0 434 93020 2.  
Douglas Hill: *The Moon Monsters*. Illustrated by Jeremy Ford. 0 434 93024 5.  
Emma Tennant: *The Ghost Child*. Illustrated by Charlotte Voake. 0 434 93025 3. 42pp.  
Heinemann. £1.95 each.

## New moves

Margaret Jacobson

GERALDINE KAYE  
Comfort Herself  
Illustrated by Jennifer Northway  
160pp. André Deutsch. £4.95.  
0 233 97614 0

We first meet Comfort Kwatey-Jones, the eleven-year-old heroine of *Comfort Herself*, running at great speed across Kensington Gardens. It is obvious that something terrible has happened and we soon learn that her mother has been knocked down by a bus and killed. Comfort, who is the daughter of a Ghanaian father and an English mother, is taken into care. She writes secretly to her father in Ghana, and at the same time she tells the social worker about her maternal grandparents who are living in a village in Kent.

With some understandable reserve these grandparents welcome into their home the child of their much-loved but wayward daughter.

## Spinning it out

Judith Elkin

CAROLYN SLOAN  
Mr Cogg and the Exploding Easter Eggs  
159pp. Macmillan. £6.95.  
0 333 36955 6  
HUNTER DAVIES  
Flossie Teacake Strikes Back!  
128pp. Bodley Head. £4.95.  
0 370 30622 8  
HELEN CRESSWELL  
Bagthorpe Abroad  
186pp. Faber. £6.95.  
0 571 13350 9

*Mr Cogg and the Exploding Easter Eggs* is a very light-hearted story, the third title about the hairbrained, eccentric inventor, Mr Cogg, his cat, Holy Mackerel, and his elderly aunt, Aunt Lacey. The mad professor theme has been used many times before, but Carolyn Sloan has a vivid imagination and develops some outrageous ideas and situations. Mr Cogg may be unworried and disorganized, the bane of the local Residents' Association, but he has developed a computer with a mind and temperament of its own and given to emotional upsets. It is able to organize itself, often way beyond Mr Cogg's ability to control or programme it. The results are often alarming: Easter Eggs which explode and scatter marzipan and fluffy chicks, and lots of other computer products; a robot designed to do the household chores, which turns out to be a bad-tempered, camel-shaped object, temperamental and given to nipping Mr Cogg in the knees, while coddling Holy Mackerel with hot-water bottles and sardines, fed to him from a golden spoon. These inventive stories will appeal enormously to the average reader of eight or over.

*Flossie Teacake Strikes Back!* is also a follow-up, the third title about the individual and

outrageous Flossie Teacake. Previous stories have already proved popular and these three separate tales maintain the level of humour. Flossie Teacake discovered in an earlier book that by wearing her sister's fur-coat she could grow from the rather plump, bespectacled ten-year-old into a slim, elegant and unrecognizable eighteen-year-old. This leads her into all kinds of excessive adventures; posing as a dancing instructor to her own dancing class and victimizing the girls she dislikes; then acting as a fortune-teller at her school fête, and showing an uncanny knowledge of the staff and pupils, who consult her. Hunter Davies's style of writing is at times rather sloppy; some of the incidents are underdeveloped, often with inconsistencies and loose ends, while other episodes are ludicrously overdone. The individual characters are fairly superficial but there are occasional very perceptive flashes of what ten-year-old girls are like, especially when they are largely ignored by the rest of the family. The plots may be excessive, the humour at times verging on the manic, but the stories are amusing, undemanding and will be read with great relish.

Helen Cresswell is in a different league. She is a master-storyteller, in total control of her characters and plot. Her language is uncompromising, subtle and very funny. In this fifth title in the Bagthorpe saga, "sensitive, artistic" (or so he thinks) author, Mr Bagthorpe, having had a manuscript rejected, decides to take his amazingly gifted family abroad on a holiday in a rented cottage, selected in the interests of his research into the supernatural. Helen Cresswell continues the saga without any falling-off in quality, inventiveness commitment. The family are as odd as ever and the pleasure and anticipation of disasters is increased by previous involvement with the family. This can be highly recommended for the committed, able reader.

The growing bond between the sensitive and independent-minded Comfort and her stiff, old-fashioned Granny is movingly portrayed, as is Comfort's friendship with the village children. Before she can start school, however, a letter arrives from her father asking her to come to Ghana.

All Comfort's pluck and adaptability are put to the test over the next few months, and we follow her adventures in Ghana with sympathy and curiosity. The country is exciting and the customs are strange, as are the familiar things in a different setting – Paddington Bear curtains on the window, and servants "like the telly – 'Upstairs, Downstairs'". She first spends some time with Mante, her father, who is delighted to see her, although his feelings are not shared by his new wife, Ebus, formerly a beauty queen and air hostess. Then she stays with her Ghanaian grandmother, a formidable figure who trades in cloth at the market, as well as owning a lorry and several cocoa farms. She makes

a special favourite of her "been-to" granddaughter and tries to rule her as she rules the rest of the village. Comfort learns a great deal: from how to make *abumu* out of vegetables, fish and palm oil, to how to be patient and accept a new code of behaviour.

But certain things start to disturb her. A baby dies. Her cousin Ama comes of age and there is talk of marriage. A visiting couple speak to her one day in the market and, as she starts to think again about England and the possibilities once open to her, she decides to make a new move.

The complex story explores a variety of cultural and physical backgrounds. The authenticity of detail, the strong story-line and the insight into Comfort's character make *Comfort Herself* a compelling and very enjoyable book. The prose is straightforward and clear and the young reader will have no difficulty in identifying with Comfort and in understanding her dilemmas. Jennifer Northway's excellent line drawings add greatly to the impact.

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Jenny the Witch



# Picture books 1

**SUSAN HILL**  
*One Night at a Time*  
Illustrated by Vanessa Julian-Ottie  
Hamish Hamilton. £4.95.  
0241 11229 X

Susan Hill's *One Night at a Time* is a book, which, one feels, will be useful both for children with problems and their parents. Tom is a small boy who suffers from irrational fears. His imagination transforms ordinary objects (washing machine, garden shears, a television cartoon) into the essence of nightmares. He may be told there is no cause for alarm but he understands only too well that there is a crucial difference between what you know and how you feel. There is both drama and humour in his predicament and tact and wisdom in his mother's response as she helps him control his fears. Vanessa Julian-Ottie's line and wash illustrations, although attractive, rather fail to exploit the possibilities offered by the text: they do little more than provide a visual commentary on surface events. The artist concentrates on cosy interiors and does not connect with Tom's feelings. The nightmare images are not convincing and to repeat the device of Tom's peeping out from his eiderdown four times reveals a lack of pictorial invention.

**JOHN BURNINGHAM**  
*Grampa*  
Cape. £4.95.  
0224 02279 2

As the picture book industry grows ever more commercial, the identity of the consumer becomes more obscure. This "problem of address" can divide artists into slick commercial goats, or shaggy artistic sheep. Though several of John Burningham's books (notably *Would You Rather?* and the Mr Gumpy stories) are brilliantly designed for reading aloud, some of his earlier tales (*Borka*, *Trubloff*, *Cantonball Ship*) are so oddly comic as to seem almost surreal. In *Grampa*, Burningham is at his best. The book is a celebration of the elderly. His latest book, *Grampa*, continues to beg the question of address since its superficial inconsequence and underlying concern with the passage of time demand that the young reader must grasp its meaning intuitively, if at all. Yet despite a fundamental elusiveness, there is much here to recognize and enjoy: the relationship of a small girl with her grandfather is unfolded in one-liners that belong to a longer conversation we do not overhear: "There would be no room for all the little seeds to grow" is set in an Edenic greenhouse. "That was not a nice thing to say to Grampa" has the crestfallen protagonists marching away from one another across the white space of their respective pages.

As the book progresses, Grampa's own long-lost childhood begins to cut in: "Were you once a baby as well, Grampa?" Line sketches are used to suggest thoughts and memories; thus the glowing winter sunset of the present faces a sketch of Grampa tobogganing as a boy ("You nearly slipped then, Grampa"). Now Grampa is

poorly, confined to his armchair, and the two watch telly while a sketchy steamboat approaches the horizon. Finally the sketches of dialogue and the counterpoint of realized colour picture and imagined line drawings disappear altogether. The little girl gazes at an empty armchair. A final wordless postscript shows a child racing over a windswept hill with a baby in a pram. Much of the book's power lies in its use of apparently simple line and colour effects to evoke a vivid atmosphere—the brightness of the seaside, the darkness of a thunderstorm are wonderfully suggested by a yellow wash or scrubbed brown crayon. The economy of words and pictures at once reflect and celebrate the joys and sorrows of temporal existence, and the divergent perspectives of old man and child, briefly united in play. The intensity and integrity of Burningham's vision ultimately justify his refusal to make it all too easy.

Julia Briggs

**SUSAN RAMSAY HOGUET**  
*I Unpacked My Grandmother's Trunk*  
Oxford University Press. £4.95.  
019 2797999

"I unpacked my grandmother's trunk" is an alphabetical memory game which does much to ameliorate long car journeys along with I-Spy and "Ten Green Bottles". It can be played by two or more children of, roughly, the five to eight age range. The first child thinks of an object beginning with a as in "I unpacked my grandmother's trunk and found an aardvark". The next player ripostes with "I unpacked my grandmother's trunk and found an aardvark and babacote" and so on through the alphabet. The hard part is remembering the anomalous collection of objects and the child who forgets an object or says it in the incorrect order is out. It is difficult to see the point of turning this improvisation game into a book other than to indulge the illustrator. As the introduction points out: "If using this book for the game, players should first go through the book, then close it and play the game from memory" — rather a waste of £4.95. But *I Unpacked My Grandmother's Trunk* seems designed to appeal to three or four-year-olds who would be too young to play the game but would enjoy the cumulative pictures. They might be rather taxed or bored by the extreme refinement of these illustrations. They work quite well in the early stages when only an acrobat, a bear and a cloud have been unpacked but as the alphabet unfolds and pages fill up with dinosaurs, eagles, fairies and grass it becomes a bit of a muddle. All the objects are beautifully arranged and wittily juxtaposed but I wonder whether a small child would notice or understand such savvy. Illustrated children's books fall into three categories: those loved by both children and adults (these are eventually known as "classics"), those that children love (often unpleasant to adult eyes) and those that adults feel children ought to like. *I Unpacked My Grandmother's Trunk* belongs in the last category.

Tanya Harrod



From the book reviewed below.

**ALICE and MARTIN PROVENSEN**  
*Town and Country*  
Cape. £5.95.  
0 224 02084 6

The picture-book art of Alice and Martin Provensen has changed considerably over the past ten years. The deceptive simplicity is still there in *Town and Country*, but now the early boisterousness has been tamed. The sophisticated naivety deliberately echoes nineteenth-century American artisan painting in the stiff clarity of its representational detail, in the sharply defined flat patches of colour, and in the defiance of perspective in the crowded urban and agricultural scenes. The grey weather-boarded barn, the neat post and rail fencing, the straight backed black cattle and the demure sheep could all have been lifted from Edward Hicks's *The Residence of David Twining*. A dual educational function is performed by this finely produced book: it not only presents aspects of transatlantic life, but trains the eye, familiarizing it with a particularly distinctive form of Quakerish American painting.

The Provensens' illustrations are for ranging over, finding and recognizing incidents and objects. The text, secondary to the visual appeal, merely hints at the copious variety. It does not necessarily correspond closely to the accompanying pictures. It is impossible to locate "a pancake in a Pancake-house... a nice hot cup of tea" among the range of the ethnic restaurants and food shops. On the other hand, there is a man sitting a mound of rice with chopsticks, sausages hanging across windows, fish being weighed, bags of hot chestnuts on sale, a dog with a bagel in its mouth, and a packed French restaurant, bow-tied waiter holding aloft a tureen of soup. The city is a neatened version of New York, characterized

by tall lozenges of skyscrapers, by bridges, elevated roadways, the subway and neon signs. Yet even the office workers struggling down Broadway or riding into the Port Authority terminal look cheerful. It is a place for action, whether playing hopscotch or sledging in Central Park, staring at strange Indian sculptures in the Met or going to the San Gennaro street festival in Little Italy. At every opportunity, a bustling and harmonious cultural mix is stressed. It is a visitors' view: a city to have fun in, to observe in its strangeness.

By contrast, the countryside, beautiful in its floating autumnal mists, is a place of work. The country town has an aspic-pickled air (clearly it has benefitted from the efforts of the local conservation society) but on returning to the farm there are seedlings to be planted, vegetables and fruit to be bottled and frozen, hay to be baled, animals to be fed, eggs to be collected — and the point is made that even small children help with all this. While the first pages of the book offer an excellent visual guide for young children about to visit New York, this busy rurality is the world the Provensens understand, in which, as their earlier books suggest, they feel at home.

Kate Flint

**RON MARIS**  
*Are you there, Bear?*  
Julia MacRae. £4.95.  
0 86203 174 5

In *Are you there, Bear?* someone rather small-aggled, I would guess, about three — goes in search of his teddy bear after dark. This small person does not turn on the bedroom light (perhaps being unable to reach the switch) and so sensibly uses a torch. A torch-holding three-year-old's perspective is necessarily circumscribed, which is why this book's illustrations are a little gloomy. The greater part of each page is given over to the murky water-colour washes, outside the torch's beam we can just make out a bedroom crowded with enticing toys. First we meet Donkey in a supine position under the bed and he hops up obligingly to help in the search for Bear. Jack-in-the-Box is fled to his home and sharply told to get back inside it but Little Doll and Raggedy and Spike, and the family mongrel, join in the adventure. On page twenty eight Bear is found, engrossed in a bear book. All the toys and Spike gather round excitedly. "Tell us a story, Bear," they cry. The quest is ingeniously handled although a three or four-year-old might find the shadowy parts of the illustrations mystifying. There are lots of details lurking there and while it is fun trying to make them out it is also quite difficult. Note the least this is a nice book to read to a three-year-old with an interest in torches.

Julia Briggs



From *Mog and Me* by Judith Kerr (Collins. £1.50 0 00 13841 6)

**CHARLES KEEPING**  
*Sammy Streetsinger*  
Oxford University Press. £4.95.  
0 19279782 4

Sammy Streetsinger, a one-man band in a subway at the edge of town, is discovered by Ivor Chance (Ivor Flatvoles is named later) the circus proprietor. Sammy becomes a singing clown, but Ivor has plans for him which involve hoisting him with a hook so that he is tipped out of his trousers onto the sawdust ring and soaked in water. We see his black polka-dot underpants. Mr. Bigknob the impresario is sufficiently impressed by Sammy's talent to offer to make him a star. "With his hair ironed and fixed up, a guitar and a gaudy suit, he was soon singing on stage each night with two grating girls." As the clichés warn us, Sammy is due to fall from the dream which becomes loneliness in a mansion where "Even a dog didn't stop." Actually, the dog in the picture does seem to have stopped to use his wall, but

# Picture books 2

**PETER CROSS**  
*Trumpets in Grumpeland*  
A and C Black. £4.95.  
0 71362608 9

*Trumpets in Grumpeland*, is a sequel to *Trumpets for Trumpets*. The titles are flat and the texts lack wit, but the inventiveness and originality of Peter Cross's illustrations more than compensate. As an artist, Cross is intrigued by the different possibilities of visual communication, the variety of overt and cryptic meanings that pictures can carry. The cover of his new book characteristically includes a telephone incorporated in a mountain range, a bearded head, a snail shell and a game of noughts-and-crosses concealed in the grass, as well as someone carrying a copy of his earlier book. In that, action pictures of miniature military operations were wreathed in carefully observed flowers and insects. Hidden faces, runes, pums, pictures within pictures abounded; the richness of the art-work invited and repaid lengthy examination. The style, revelling in colour, design and detail, owed something to Kit Williams and Nicola Bayley, although tinged with a commercial slickness they skillfully avoid. Like them, Cross is especially interested in plants and animals. He manages to exclude the almost too expressive human form by peopling his surreal landscapes with the Moomin-like Trumpets and Grumpets. These stiff little creatures are well designed to wear a variety of different uniforms, and their small stature and furry-toy quality insulate their militarism, allowing Cross to invent for them a series of fantastic weapons. They are less suited to romantic adventures — the female of the species is horribly vulgarized by cupid's-bow lips.

Inevitably the extraordinary visual exuberance of the earlier book proves difficult to live up to: the publishers have reduced the format and done away with the panoramic end-pages; the colour reproduction is paler and muzzier, lacking the high resolution so fully exploited by its predecessor. But there is still much to delight and amuse — a wonderfully ornamental Pullman train steams out of a flower-bed Victorian-gothic station; pastiche Chinese landscapes are framed by a red-lacquered screen, and there is a series of puns and allusions, at once comic and mysterious. Though too many of these come at the beginning, so that the book as a whole tends to run out of steam, it will be eagerly welcomed by Trumpetomanes, and should please anyone who likes to look into pictures as well as at them.

Lachlan Mackinnon



From *King Rollo's Letter* and other stories by David McKee (Andersen. £4.95. 0 8624 076 8)

**MARILYN SADLER**  
*Allstair in Outer Space*  
Illustrated by Roger Bollen  
Hamish Hamilton. £4.95.  
0241 11233 8

One of Guy Burgess's last acts before quitting England was to return all his overdue library books. Otherwise he bears little resemblance to Allstair Grittle, the sombre, bespectacled hero of Marilyn Sadler's book; but the preoccupation they share lies deep in the bourgeois psyche. Allstair gets rather a raw deal in this deadpan space odyssey, as friendly but obtuse extra-terrestrials continually prevent him from getting his books back on time.

The tone is beautifully sustained throughout, with clear rainbow-coloured illustrations and a decisive commentary; but the matter-of-face sequence authentically conveys the sense of those bad dreams in which a minor duty achieves the status of major obsession. Allstair's psychological make-up is further indicated by his preoccupation with washing his hands before opening a library book, and this leads to yet more trouble; looking for the bathroom on a spaceship, he is catapulted into outer space, school cap primly placed on top of his space helmet. "When the Goots found Allstair he was showing the Trollabobbles his library card."

As a reversal of all those morality-tales based on unheeded precepts, this is fun; but it leaves the nagging memory of a task unfulfilled. The last illustration shows a relieved Allstair dismounting from the spaceship after splashdown at "home", but the pile of library books faithfully held before him hides the fact that he has landed on an ice-floe, surrounded by penguins. It is hard not to be worried, by more that the fate of the library books; and it seems slightly unfair that a decent impulse should be so heartlessly mocked.

The book is nicely gauged to span children's liking for both anarchy and order, though the author is evidently in sympathy with the former at the expense of the latter.

Roy Foster



From Captain Pugwash: *The Battle of Bunkum Bay* (Bodley Head. £5.50. 0 37030830 1)

**BERNARD STONE**  
*Quasimodo Mouse*  
Illustrated by Ralph Steadman  
Andersen. £4.95.  
0 86264 072 5

*Quasimodo Mouse* may please aficionados of Ralph Steadman's drawing, but it is hard to know where else its appeal may lie. A hunch-backed bell-ringing Parisian mouse as hero suggests a nudge archly directed at knowing grown-ups; so, indeed, do Steadman's ingenious visual references to Corot, Pissarro, Dufy (and possibly David Hockney's "Flight into Italy"). But the story is loose, unconnected, and generally bears the marks of an obscure in-joke. A cycling holiday through France culminates in an extremely soppy romantic encounter at Cassis; adventures on the way are curiously episodic and unfocused, and the story is never realized as strikingly as the dashing illustrations in wash, stipple and ink. A chord may be struck here and there in the very young; but it is left to Steadman's wild little landscapes to carry the theme, and they are not enough.

Roy Foster

**MICHAEL FOREMAN**  
*Cat and Canary*  
Andersen. £4.95.  
0 86264 075 X

Left alone by his master ("Oh, you are lucky. You just lie around the house all day, lazy cat."), our hero shakes off all feline passivity;

freeing the canary and fixing breakfast before taking to the roof. The rather cutely drawn cat has pacifist/vegetarian tendencies — "He never chased birds. After all his best friend was a canary." — though the message, previously the *raison d'être* of Michael Foreman's books, is muted here. Once airborne, however, Cat becomes almost disembodied, soaring above the city blown by winds and seen from dizzying perspectives. The New York City background, with the GE, Chrysler and Empire State buildings all recognizable if topographically misplaced, forms a dramatic backdrop to Cat's uncontrollable flight in washes of violet evening light and falling snow. Finally, in the manner of more traditional animal tales, Cat is rescued by Canary and a flock of friendly birds.

The slight but resonant story of brief freedom and return to safety is given the full Foreman treatment. The city's most photogenic aspects are selected for a technique which involves vibrant colour, light and shade, busy detail — anything which might add to the drama. Full colour pages contain spectacular foregroundings and long-distance views. The result is unharmonious but undoubtedly exciting.

Peter Blake

## Elizabeth Barry

**RON MARIS**  
*The Punch and Judy Book*  
Collins. £4.95.  
0 075 03414 9

Like circuses, Punch and Judy shows are often enthusiastically promoted by adults and feared by small children: a help for the more timid might be Ron Maris's original and appealing book. A brief outline history of the show's origins is provided for older children but the main part of the book is given over to a typical Punch performance: bashing the baby, beating up Judy and the doctor, hanging the policeman and ending up triumphant. The text consists solely of dialogue and the illustrations use a series of vertical half-pages to reveal the next atrocity.

The clear, colourful pictures manage by a feat of restrained vulgarity to be both cheerful and elegant. The reiterations of the text — "What a nice big stick!", "That's the way to do it!" — are simple enough but they aptly convey Mr Punch's manic intensity. The quickly turned half-pages give the illusion of pace and movement.

Elizabeth Barry

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No 1, November 30th 1984. BOOKS FOR CHILDREN.

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John Hurt Upstaged by Schoolboy!



# The subversive element

Alan Franks

Writing fiction for very young children is a difficult art. The form demands of the adult author a turn of ventriloquism. Throwing your voice is hard enough at the best of times, but when it entails the crossing of a generational boundary, the task becomes formidable.

Juliet and Charles Snape have travelled soundly and sympathetically down the years with *Emily the Engine Driver* and *Daniel Likes Dancing*. Both books concern the attainment of childhood fantasies in the grown-up world. Emily is obsessed, as so many children have been since the steam revolution, with the notion of driving a train; for fun and as a possible vocation. It is her birthday next Sunday and she has been promised an Awdryday at the seaside.

The fictions of the track do not seem to have progressed from the staidness of the Rev. W. Awdry and Graham Greene; the romance of the railway is stubbornly embodied in images of funnel and tender. It is a land in which Brunel holds sway still, and in which the Inter-City 125 is an unwelcome parvenu. Emily, however, dreams of a life at the helm of a great, roaring yellow-and-black diesel unit, speeding her passengers to the seaside. Well, almost. For, once on the beach a sand train is erected which is more closely related to Thomas the Tank Engine than the Advanced Passenger Train; while not far away our heroine and her mother discover a miniature railway which is driven by steam. At the end of the day Emily returns home on an instantly recognizable Inter-City gas guzzler, a modern railway child. There are no such split loyalties in *Daniel Likes Dancing*, which is addressed to a child's surrender to music. Everyone Daniel sees, from the school teacher, to the band in the park, to the trumpet-playing tiger of his dreams, is engaged in some manner of melodic activity. Music is everywhere, say the authors; look for it and you will find it, particularly if you have not yet graduated to the atonal world of maturity. As with trains, so with tunes. These are both imaginative pieces, their brief unfussy texts matched to pictures in clear poster-paint colours with plenty of detail.

Babies, even more than parents, pose a terrible threat to their siblings. Not only do they upstage in the time-honoured manner of all animals, but they also hijack that very identity which was yours until two or three short years ago. So Jan Ormerod's *101 Things to do with a Baby*, a series of domestic vignettes in her characteristically romantic style, comes as a timely manual for the dispossessed. This is a bold diversion, and provides no more and no less than its title claims. Here we have an elder sister, a mother, father and granny finding ways of playing with the newcomer. The plays are not all conciliatory, it must be said; numbers 98 and 99 read: "Shout at him", and "make him cry", which are always good standbys at the end of a long day with the family. But

100 and 101 are "Give him a cuddle" and "kiss him goodnight".

Evenings, the hour of the absent parent and the present baby-sitter, are when all the horrors happen. Shirley Hughes knows this as well as any, judging by her little drama of burst pipes and flooded floors, *An Evening at Alfie's*. The difference here is that it is a pair of adults, the sitters' parents Mr and Mrs MacNally, familiar figures from the previous Alfie books, who come from across the road to the rescue like a cross between the American cavalry and a firm of virtuoso plumbers. "We ought to turn the water off from the main", says Maureen, "but I don't know how you do it. I think I'd better fetch Dad." What a world of wisdom is here and how re-assuring to see that the adult retains a role. Shirley Hughes's strength comes from the veracity of her drawings. The sympathy of her portrayal of Alfie makes this the best portrait of a child in any of the books reviewed here.

Tony Bradman's *A Kiss on the Nose*, a collection of rhymes for the very young, comes across as a sort of Life in the Day of a subversive toddler, far removed from cosiness. The pictures by Sumiko are somewhat less down-to-earth than the verses, which deal with some basic themes:

This is me on the potty.  
Sometimes I hear a tinkle.  
Sometimes I hear a thud.  
Sometimes I go red in the face.  
Sometimes I point at what I've done.  
I laugh.  
So do Mum and Dad.  
At last!

Like the Snapes, Mary Dickinson knows the true inflections of knee-high aspirations. For the parent shopping expeditions fall somewhere between the assault course and the indulgence by proxy; for the child, particularly when clothes are object of the exercise, they mean the lifting of a curtain into a whole new stage of identities. Dickinson and her illustrator, who have collaborated in previous books about the straitly Alex, appear to know the drama by heart.

So too does Sarah Garland, her subject being the no less heady one of *Having a Picnic*. The expedition is to a local park with square tower blocks seemingly a crumb's throw from the toddlers, the dogs, the ducks and the windblown and exhausted mum. Garland's lively autumnal tableaux are accompanied by the briefest of texts written in caption form. As someone once said of newspapers, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Juliet and Charles Snape's *Emily the Engine Driver*, 086203 172 9. *Daniel Likes Dancing*, 086203 173 7. Julia MacRae, £3.50 each.  
Jan Ormerod's *101 Things to do with a Baby*, Viking/Kestrel, £4.95. 0 7226 5929 6.  
Shirley Hughes, *An Evening at Alfie's*, Bodley Head, £4.95. 0 370 30584 4.  
Tony Bradman, *A Kiss on the Nose*, illustrated by Sumiko, Heinemann, £5.50. 0 434 92945 X.  
Mary Dickinson, *New Clothes for Alex*, illustrated by Charlotte Frazin, Deutsch, £3.95. 0 233 97685.  
Sarah Garland, *Having a Picnic*, Bodley Head, £4.50. 0 370 30560 4.

# Moveable feasts

Paula Neuss

JANET and ALLAN AHLBERG  
*Yum Yum*  
0670 80070 8  
Playmates  
0670 80071 6  
32pp. Viking/Kestrel. £4.95 each.

Janet and Allan Ahlberg's ingenious new books have pictures with small slots into which can be fitted a variety of cut-out objects – if the robot tires of his breakfast of old cans, pans, bolts and pins he can swap it for a boiled egg. The books work on the principle that slots, possibilities are endless and the great thrill (not merely for a child) is that there are no rules. To combine reading with game is a tricky business; a child can easily become suspicious and refuse to play. But when one is allowed to make up one's own rules, "reading" is less onerous; indeed it takes place almost unconsciously.

The figures in *Playmates* may be cited "correctly" (duck in bath, chicken in farmyard, baby in buggy) but if a fantasist chooses to sit the "sitting-room mouse" on the elephant's back or the hedgehog in the bath and use the cat as a ball for the monkey, the concepts "bath" and "ball" will still be absorbed. *Playmates* provides scope for a variety of activities,

from swapping to tidying-up.

*Yum Yum* gives marginally greater pleasure, probably because it is always fun to play with one's food. There are enough moveable feasts for everyone on the party page to have a savoury course first, parents will be glad to know. The dog and cat can have the same bone and fish that they got on the "Feed the animals" pages. The witch tends to end up with the boiled egg, but if she is still hungry she can always have the baby's bottle too. (The slots are wide enough, and the slotters strong enough, for two or even three to be gathered together.) Take the sweets from the shop and with the puddings and cake the table will groan. Janet and Allan Ahlberg's earlier books, though always good, have sometimes slipped too deep into whimsy. In *Yum Yum* and *Playmates* the reader takes final responsibility for crazy or comic juxtapositions (even though these have only been made possible by the Ahlbergs' inventiveness) and can impose his own pattern or disorder. Among the cast and slotters are some of their particular favourites: witches, bears, cats, frogs and babies.

These books are beautifully produced, tough enough to last a long time and provided with complete sets of spare slotters. They are attractive, inventive and educational, and like most of the Ahlbergs' books, they are sure to have the popular success they deserve.

# Night walks

Blake Morrison

GREGG REYES  
*Zoo Walk*  
Oxford University Press. £4.50.  
0 192 79795 0

Gothic tales for children are apt to run along the same few well-worn rails. Witches, goblins, bats and monsters, or their extra-terrestrial equivalents, still do most of the spooking. It is refreshing to come across a picture book like Gregg Reyes's *Zoo Walk*, which from unlikely material spins an original and haunting little story. It would be a pity if potential readers were deterred by the book's stark black and white pages or supposed that the absence of colour were merely a gimmick.

The story is plain enough. Little Moby is taken out for a walk at night by his rather dubious-looking master. The moon is full, there are mysterious clucks, growls, screeches and howls in the air, and as they walk past the entrance to the zoo they find that repair work and two sleeping night-watchmen have left the gates wide open. They step inside, past the cages of clawing lions and statuesque rhinos, and over the bridge which seems to lead straight into the mouth of a hippopotamus. When they leave the zoo again, so too

apparently do half of its inhabitants: aren't those two cheetahs bounding along under a lamppost, camels raiding the dustbins, gazelles skipping across a roof? Moby's first act when he gets home is to drive away a mouse. But as we see him on the porch getting "an extra-special cuddle for being such a brave and watchful dog", we can also see from the animal heads in the windows behind that he has not executed his duties in full.

The eerie atmosphere of *Zoo Walk* comes less from the narrative than from the silhouette drawings, beautifully clear yet always revealing details you failed to notice first or even tenth time round: a distant train, the reflection of Moby and his master in a tiger's pupil, the flowers hurled (during a lovers' tiff) from the upstairs window of a Hammer horror house. The subtle handling of light and shade transforms familiar and even jokey animals (moose, elephants) into sinister dream-creatures, phantoms set free from the unconscious, uncaged night-fears. And from the homeliness of the inside cover (twenty excellent little drawings of a man out exercising his dog), we move into a less stable and rational zone – the walk through the park as a walk through a game park – while never getting too far away from the resonant little truth which the fable could be said to illustrate: it's scary being out at night.

HIAWYN ORAM  
*In the Attic*  
Illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura  
Ondrea £4.95.  
0 86264 074 1

The hero of *In the Attic* climbs there to escape his boredom, using the ladder of a toy fire-engine. The room he leaves is drawn so that it feels like the rooms of childhood, with high window-sills and an expanse of carpet round a cluster of toys, the walls plain and a lightbulb out of reach on the mantelpiece. In the attic he finds among other things a family of mice playing inventively with household objects. This is followed by "a colony of beetles and a cool, quiet place to rest and think". As in each attic picture (except when he is with a spider, building a web) he is on a circular section of attic floor here; it is overgrown with brilliant plants, projecting into stony blackness, beetles munging and flying and leaping. When tired of these lonely pleasures, the little boy climbs down into an eerie gloaming landscape where he finds a tiger to share his world with. They speak to each other, the boy's speech-bubble filled with stripes the same as those on his jersey, the tiger's with tiger stripes. This oddly haunting vaguely surreal image has the general colour Satoshi Kitamura used throughout.

Tiger and boy return to the attic, now a phantasmagoria of chessboards, dice, planets and *Miraculous forms*. At the end of the book, the mother's kitchen floor echoes the chessboard while, outside the window, the tiger moves away through long grass under a white full moon. Inside, the mother doesn't understand the boy's story because she "hasn't found the ladder" to an attic which was only imagined. This is a delightful book to read aloud. Each picture is enthralling. Hiawyn Oram's text is engaging but not so gripping that we are rushed by it, and text and pictures work together to suggest the immensity of inner and outer space and the strangeness of hidden corners with a poetic economy and force which make this book memorable.

The winner of this year's Kurt Mascher/Emil award is John Burningham's *Grampa* (Cape). The four shortlist titles were *The Story of the Dancing Frog* by Quentin Blake (Cape), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* illustrated by Justin Todd (Gollancz), *Christmas* by Jan Pienkowski (Heinemann) and *James Riddan's The Woman in the Moon and other tales of forgotten heroines* illustrated by Angela Barrett (Hutchinson). *Grampa* is reviewed on page 1379.

# Interruptions to reality

Colin Greenland

PENELOPE LIVELY  
*Unsettling Ghosts and other stories*  
130pp. Heinemann. £5.95.  
0 349 94960 4  
ADELE GERAS  
*Letters of Fire and other unsettling stories*  
130pp. Hamish Hamilton. £5.95.  
0 24 11268 0  
ALISON PRINCE  
*The Ghost Within*  
109pp. Methuen. £5.95.  
0 416 40709 9  
AIDAN CHAMBERS (Editor)  
*Shades of Dark*  
126pp. Patrick Hardy. £5.95.  
0 744 0019 8

Curiously about the supernatural is not confined to any one age-group. Between them these four books, eight stories in each, cover most of the juvenile market. Penelope Lively's envisaged reader is about nine; Adele Geras's about twelve; Alison Prince's about fifteen; while Aidan Chambers's anthology addresses all these readers and some a year or two older. The common factor is identified in Geras's subtitle, "unsettling stories". The unsettling may or may not be emotional, depending on the age and mental resilience of the reader; but what is unsettling in every case is the world, the apparent natural order, by a revenant, an anomaly, a talking dog, a monster in the washing machine.

The talking dog is Penelope Lively's invention, a cad and a cynic. Only Paul can hear him. "Unfortunately," said the dog, "the adult of the species tends to have what you might call a closed mind." The new pet goes on to exploit Paul's mum and dad for all they're worth. Other intruders include the uninvited ghosts of the title, a Martian, a dragon, baby gnomes, a plague of mushrooms, a suburban neigian and an untrustworthy clock. There is something patronizing about Lively's narrative. ("Are you with me? I'll bet you are – one jump ahead, like Joe and Pete were as soon as they heard that.") Her listeners may be amused and entertained, but they are also being protected. Once she has introduced each slightly novelty, Lively's purpose is to domesticate it as far as possible, and then dispose of it as soon as may be. Sue and Alan's moveable Aunt Sadie, who accidentally exterminates the mushroom horde with her nasty cough medicine, is an unattractive substitute for Mary Poppins. However much she disapproved of magical upheavals, P. L. Travers's

# Oddly enough

Patricia Craig

PEGGY WOODFORD (Compiler)  
*Misfits*  
172pp. Bodley Head. Paperback, £3.95.  
0 370 30824 7

Peggy Woodford has assembled an interesting collection of stories about unusual adolescents, misfits and insomniacs and illiterates and outcasts. The hero of Penelope Lively's tale is a disconcerting French boy who observes with detachment the antics of three English families on an outing. Jane Gardam has a piece looking back to the Edwardian era, about an Irish farmworker affected by the phases of the moon. John Wain's contribution concerns an anxious bar-tender in quest of job security. In "King", by Jon Blake, the narrative manner is regrettably colloquial, not to say unpolished. "Thing is, Wainsey never ever done nothing wrong"; the class outcast, in this case, is a dim, cherubic looking boy who wears a

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authoritarian nanny was also the vector that brought them into the Banks household, an ambiguous shamanic figure who opened the door to the unknown while simultaneously guaranteeing the eventual return to the nursery. Lively is incapable of such imaginative resourcefulness. The only story here that doesn't ultimately seem flat is "A Flock of Gryphons", in which she satirically pits national order against natural order: a Britain of zoo-keepers and animal lovers against a litter of gryphons that eventually stretch their wings and fly away, never to be seen again.

Adele Geras is at once plainer and more daring. In "Live Music" the vampiric Miss Waverley sucks all the talent out of her anonymous pupil, leaving her "the rest of my life to find something that will fill all the empty spaces". Billy the bully, in "Billy's Hand", receives a savage supernatural punishment on a school visit to the dungeons of an old castle. Melanie, "The Poppycrunch Kid", simply goes mad, possessed by the obsessive banality of the television commercial she stars in. Geras's characters are otherwise not so much cursed as preoccupied, isolated in some way and at an angle to normality, only too likely to glimpse

# Natural causes

Idris Parry

ALAN GARNER  
*A Book of British Fairy Tales*  
Illustrated by Derek Collard  
159pp. Collins. £8.95.  
0 00 184045 2

Alan Garner's language is for the first instrument, the voice. He believes fairy tales are for everybody. They've been polished too much, they should be rescued from literature, and to do this he reverts to the tale told round the fire, depending for its magic on form, the impact of heard language, like poetry. Only poetry can appeal to instinct, and only instinct can make the connections which give meaning to irrational events.

"Fairy tale" is a term that should be taken out into a field and buried. These twenty-one tales of true stories of the supernatural, of barbaric terror, bold endurance, primitive belief. The teller is audible in the language, especially in dialect words which should be puzzling but aren't. We come to "a dark and uglysome glen" or find ourselves caught in the open "at darkish one night". We hear that "the daughter, a ramping young maid, was growed white

what lies beyond its edge. The most potent of these rather sad stories is "The Graveyard Girl", in which a Victorian child who died in a fire comes back to school to claim the childhood she never had. After initial fright her classmates rally round to support her.

*The Ghost Within*, despite some repetitiveness of themes and imagery, is the richest and most resonant of the four books. Alison Prince writes with a conviction that certifies the solidity of reality and of its interruptions. Her landscapes are bleak – Welsh granite, wartime gentility, tower blocks – but amid them vital emotional currents flow to their necessary conclusions, life and death notwithstanding. In the astonishing "The Fen Tiger" a family driven from Fulham by redundancy attempt to master a fenland farm whose previous owner drank himself to suicide. The resistance and hostility of the place become embodied, via subtle imagery of orange light and stripey shadows, in the form of a tiger which only eight-year-old Matthew can see, and which eventually claims him. Prince succeeds in persuading us that the tiger is actually there, abroad in East Anglia, yet without losing any of the horror that comes from its nightmare incongruity.

There is excellent writing too in Aidan Chambers's anthology *Shades of Dark*, especially from John Gordon, George Mackay Brown and Jan Needle. Other contributions, from Vivien Alcock, Jan Mark, Lance Salway and Helen Cresswell, are all technically sound but somehow underdeveloped. Gordon's "Left in the Dark" conveys vividly the loneliness of the young evacuee, but fails to present a coherent account of the marital spite which envelops David. Alcock's "The Champions" is a light-hearted attempt at an original ghost – a little one you can swallow – but the story of its exorcism is one scene too short. Cresswell's "A Kind of Swan Song" is terribly timid, not to say twee. Fortunately for the overall impression of the book, the best stories are the last three. Brown and Needle both describe solitary young boys on seaside holidays who fall under the influence of other, phantom, boys. As usual, Brown achieves his effect by clarifying his drama to a classical purity, while Needle creates a crawling menace by bathing every element of his story in a sourceless radiance of evil. Finally, Jean Stubbs's "His Coy Mistress" offers an ambiguous and attractive version of young love.

and waffling like a bag of bones" and "the waves came big and gully". It's not all like this. These are scattered instances, but the effect is powerful, a language not quite ours yet connected to what we know, and connected in such a way that it tells us more than we know. It's like our relationship to the supernatural, strange as it is, a distance, its importance acknowledged by instinct while the intellect is baffled.

The book begins with the story of Tom Tit Tot in a Gloucestershire version. Edward Clodd found variants of this tale in fourteen countries. So how British is it? It is as told in Britain, anyway, like the variants here of the Cinderella story and Bluebeard and Beauty and the Beast. These appear under different names but all express the continuing theme of resurrection, spring following from winter, life from death, hope from despair. In the last story, "The Castle of Melvaes", an old man's head is struck off and a young man emerges.

The visible cycle of growth and decay and rebirth is man's most pressing experience. In some of these stories the strange transformations which are his artistic expression of this

mystery are more directly related to natural causes. "The Green Mist" is a title which refers to the first faint greening of the earth in the spring. In this delicate and beautiful tale a girl's life strengthens with the surge of nature, but at the end there is a corresponding decline. She withers and dies with the ebb of life in a flower, just as Barkis goes out with the tide in *Great Expectations*.

These stories are magical and immediate. They have all the ingredients we expect – the obligatory three sons, not forgetting three daughters, and seven tasks, thwarted giants, gruesome horrors, animals on the same footing as men, only wiser. Alan Garner seems to have gone to work like Kate Crackernuts, the heroine of one of these tales, who solves her problem by "plucking nuts from trees and filling her apron". In Celtic legend the nut symbolizes wisdom – truth in a nutshell!

The book is finely produced for the eye as well as the ear. The stark and startling woodcuts by Derek Collard are, like the stories, more telling for being, with intent, only obliquely related to the recognizable world.

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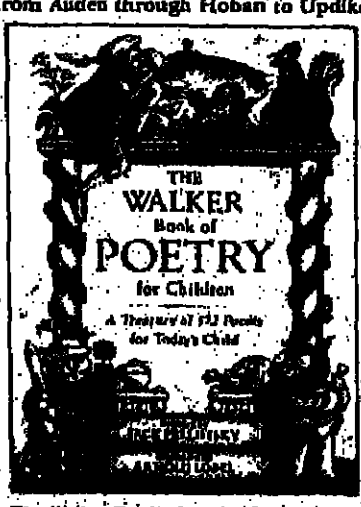
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## Late entries

### Elizabeth Winter

SUE TOWNSEND  
*The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*  
 192pp. Methuen. £4.95.  
 0413531309

The difficulty of having parents is often underestimated. Traditionally, it is the children who get into scrapes, experiment adventurously and cause anxiety. Adrian Mole, however, for all his pubescent worries, is constantly being upstaged by the delinquent behaviour of a mother who has belatedly discovered feminism and a father who has been made redundant from his job as an electric radiator salesman.

Not that Adrian always grasps immediately what is going on. Much of the comic effect of his diaries, indeed, relies on his stolid innocence. Why should Mr Lucas (his mother's lover) insist on having a blood test when baby sister Rosie is born? Why does his father go pale when Doreen Slater, looking unusually fat, unbosoms her coat? Some of these jokes will inevitably be over the head of a young reader, but the more knowing teenager will enjoy being drawn into an amiable conspiracy against the bookish (but not very bright) Adrian.

The register of his daily jottings (now covering two-and-a-half years, from the age of 13½ to 16½) wavers as violently and uncontrollably as his breaking voice - from the ponderous, pompous, multi-syllabic cliché to colloquial playground slang. We are also given samples of his more ambitious efforts - poems he submits to the BBC in the hope of instant fame, and the odd school essay of which he is particularly proud. Sue Townsend's feeling for language is acute, and we are treated to pastiches of Philip

Larkin, Jack Kerouac and others, as Adrian temporarily falls under their influence. Townsend's ear for dialogue is also excellent, and some of the more memorable characters (Bert Baxter, eighty-nine and a veteran of the trenches, or Courtney Elliot, the elegant postman who left his academic job "after a quarrel in the university common room over the allocation of chairs") come to life through their speech, transcribed with an accuracy which no teenage boy could maintain. Topical references and details of encounters at school, at the DHSS, in hospital, add up to a vivid picture of the social turmoil behind the family's immediate problems. Loss of faith in the welfare state is the background to the "nouveau poor" Mole family in their cul-de-sac in the Midlands. Only the monarchy, the BBC and Grandma seem to offer any continuity and stability.

Adrian's own little rebellion - joining a gang of skinheads for a few boring sorties then running away from home to spend his sixteenth birthday at Manchester railway station - is soon put to rights and the second volume ends on a fairly optimistic note. So far, Adrian Mole has turned out rather better than expected.

Just before his revolt, Adrian makes the following entry in his diary:  
 During the month of March 1982 it would seem that both my parents were carrying on clandestine relationships, which resulted in the birth of two children. Yet my diary for that period records my childish fourteen-year-old thoughts and preoccupations.

I wonder, did Jack the Ripper's wife innocently write:

10.30 pm Jack late home. Perhaps he is kept late at the office.

12.10 am Jack home covered in blood; an offal can knocked him down.

Adrian has lost his innocence, and the device on which these diaries depended has been blown.

## Domestic service

### Celina Fox

It has long been a worthy parental ambition to make children contribute to the common weal. Not only are there economic benefits, such activity has the useful effect of keeping small hands out of trouble and exhausting over-abundant supplies of energy. All the books under review are updated variations on this theme. It must be admitted that economic gain does not appear to be uppermost in the minds of the authors. Nevertheless, any child who can master the practical arts advanced by these books will be well qualified for advancement in the domestic service sector. None of the books adopts a crude single-sex approach (although Deutsch should be ashamed of the cookery book title, *Keep Out of the Kitchen Mum*). The real test must be whether these books are packaged attractively enough to entice children in the first place.

Jill Cox's cookery book is the least preposessing visually, the amateurish black and white drawings adding little by way of information or humour. It does however have the advantage of being able to promise almost instantaneous results and the recipes are a welcome addition to the usual toffee and jam tart repertoire. After a useful introduction on terminology, the author leads briskly into the business of making such things as pastry, mayonnaise and vinaigrette. There are recipes for croques-monsieur and pizzas as well as pancakes and flapjacks; by the end of the book, junior cooks should have graduated to elegant dinners and full-scale Sunday lunch.

*Growing Things* and *Making Presents* are designed for a younger audience. They are printed in colour on wipeable card and the overall presentation is sufficiently gay and amusing, one hopes, to camouflage the care

British Museum Publications have recently published the first two volumes in a series of activity books for young children: *The Romans* (10pp. 0 7141 2024 3. 95p.) offers a cut-out Roman general and his wife, patterns for making your own toga and mosaic and a map of Roman sites in Britain. *The Anglo-Saxons* (10pp. 0 7141 10537 6. 95p.) contains brief accounts of Sutton Hoo, Beowulf, the Battle of Maldon and provides a map with Anglo-Saxon place names, tunes and a "knighthood game" (Play Vikings Danegeld, Cn Back 4).

and patience actually needed to produce results. It is comparatively easy to interest children in planting beans and sunflowers, even bulbs and tomatoes, but it requires some ingenuity to get them involved in biennials, at alone planting trees as the first book proposes. No doubt Capability Brown had to start somewhere and one often underestimates a child's attention span when gripped by his own special hobby. *Making Presents* provides scope for more immediate forms of gratification. The gifts in question - pasta necklaces, petit fours, painted eggs and piggy banks - if not extraordinarily inventive, at least should give recipients enough opportunities to reflect that, after all, it's the thought that counts.

*The Big Book for Nifty Knitters* is certainly bigger than the other works and is published in hardback, but given the sponsorship of one of our leading wool manufacturers (who have stuck "free" needles on the cover and are the only brand of yarns recommended), it is remarkably expensive. I have yet to meet anyone who learnt to knit from a book as opposed to practical demonstration, so the book stands or falls mainly on its patterns. These extend to bobbie hats, scarves, leg warmers, jumpers, toys, blankets and shawls, hardly an innovative list. However, the instructions are enlivened by the presence of a very trend-conscious frog, for no obvious reason other than to woo the reader; his skilling and cycling activities, but most of all his participation in Jane Fonda-style exercise classes are a delight to observe.

Jill Cox *Keep Out of the Kitchen Mum*. Deutsch. £4.95. 0 233 97686 8.  
 Angela Wilkes *Growing Things*. Illustrated by John Shackell. Usborne. £2.50. 0 850 20957 5.  
 Clare Rosen *Making Presents*. Illustrated by Lily Whitlock. Usborne. £2.50. 0 850 20858 3.  
 Rosemary Center and Deborah Van Der Beek *The Big Book for Nifty Knitters*. Macmillan. £6.95. 0 333 37268 9 (with needles).

Both books are simply produced and illustrated with clear line drawings based on actual objects, though the Romans volume has a few "artist's impressions". Plenty of opportunity is provided for drawing, colouring and cutting out. Both books adopt an undidactic approach, which sometimes overdoes the material: "Hello, I'm Marcus... Cut me out like this," and which asks compulsive questions: "What would you have done in Burlington Place?" *The Eskimos* will be published in December (0 1741 1576 2).

## Into nothingness

### Dominic Hibberd

ELIZABETH WEBSTER  
*A Boy Called Bracken*  
 253pp. Plunkett. £8.95.  
 086188 408 6  
 WILLIAM CORLETT  
*Boxworth Blue*  
 148pp. Julia MacRae. £6.95.  
 086203 201 6

It is a pity that we shall never know whether literary historians will look back on current children's books as a last flicker of Romantic-Christian values or as a bright flame of truth burning amid chaos. The main characters in both *A Boy Called Bracken* and *Boxworth Blue* touch mystery in a moment of "wonder", a term Carlyle was using when the Victorians were young. If these two novels can succeed in activating their readers' sense of wonder, they will have a good chance of forestalling the modern cynicism that could demolish one of them and damage the other.

Elizabeth Webster's book is about death and how to cope with it. Faced with that ultimatum from the doctors that we all dread, her protagonist hides himself away in a Cotswold cottage - only to meet a gypsy boy who, by show-

ing him the local wild life, gently leads him to see that in the cycle of living and dying each day has to be lived for itself. The process of nursing injured creatures must end in letting them go, so that the opening of the cage door becomes a parallel to death, a release into oneness with nature. If that sounds Shelleyan, it's meant to; Webster slips a line from "Adonais" into her text as a clue. Young readers may not recognize the quotation but they will have no difficulty in seeing the point of the symbolism, which is thoroughly explained. Too thoroughly, in fact; the writing in general could do with being a little more polished. There are too many exclamation marks, clichés and rows of dots, excuses for imprecise expression that leave the book unnecessarily vulnerable to charges of sentimentality and exhortation. Symbols ought to be treated as something other than ciphers or realistic details. How, the cynic will say, can we be expected to believe in this "gold-brown" boy who is always there at the right moment, ready to draw attention to some convenient omen or nightingale? In these days of chemicals, bulldozers and dying trees, how can there be any of the old consolation left in the thought of becoming one with herb and stone? Cynicism must fight it out with wonder. If the latter wins, this book will come as a brave and moving attempt to dispel a modern nightmare

by means that have comforted many people in the past.

*Boxworth Blue* is certainly polished and, as its blurb says, ambitious. In under 150 pages, an old man on his deathbed in Lincoln confesses to a murder, a middle-aged couple pick up the pieces of their marriage, their daughter loses her virginity and their son comes up against the facts of life and death as he listens and watches at his old uncle's bedside. It all seems modern enough, with words that would have been unthinkable in a Victorian adult novel, but over everything there towers the ancient, mysterious strength of the Cathedral. In an extraordinary, dramatic climax, the boy becomes the second Lincoln Imp, the one that didn't get turned to stone, dancing at night on the High Altar until he trips and falls with the cross. In bewildered terror at the mystery of man's life in a universe of incomprehensible law, this lawless "hooligan" shouts defiantly that he forgives his uncle even if no one else does. The sun rises, filling the great interior with light, and the second Imp is accepted into the pattern like his stone brother. This is not an overtly Christian novel, nor does it preach, but the boy is found safely asleep, still clutching the battered cross. The image is left unexplained and inconclusive; as Carlyle insisted, mystery has to be seen as mystery.

## Parent-baiting ploys

### Joanna Motion

TIMEKNEMORE  
*Changing Times*  
 149pp. Faber. £5.95.  
 0 571 13285 5

Victoria Hadley, the central character of Tim Kenemore's new novel, would be poisonous to know but she makes excellent literary company. Her exterior is angelic. She is bright, articulate and ambitious. But in mid-adolescence she relishes the role of parent-baiter. She's the kind of girl who wants a bayonet for a birthday present and stages mock-suicides to keep her family on their toes. "Fifteen, thought Victoria, brushing her golden hair with loving care. A very difficult age."

Victoria is a bridge orphan. Her desiccated parents disappear to the club every night in a state of war with each other and all possible partners. Every breakfast they anatomize these games in language whose acidity rubs off on their daughter. Comfort comes from her well-developed self-esteem, from time spent with her sympathetic boyfriend Daniel, a few

select school friends and a satisfyingly sharp approach to the world.

Victoria had had one boyfriend before Daniel, if you could call it that. Keith Bellamy was his name, and she had only taken up with him on the principle that anything was better than nothing. Keith Bellamy was very nearly nothing. He kept guppies.

Escape of another kind is offered by a junk-shop clock. In a matter-of-fact way (Victoria is a rational being and a would-be scientist, after all), the clock's magic gives her three excursions into her own past, to investigate her history with near-adult eyes. It also provides an opportunity to test-market the future. Going in either direction Victoria is a visitor, on an exploratory branch-line from the real course of her life. She can participate in past events or future possibilities in an experimental way, without being irrevocably committed to what she finds there.

The results are instructive. Victoria raises questions about her parents and how they live - and if she can't forgive her mother's spinelessness, at least she can grow to understand some of the reasons behind it. Most tellingly of all, her dry-run on the future shows her how patterns repeat themselves, how she and Daniel

risk becoming just those things she despises in their parents; how complacent, clever Victoria could find herself trapped in an over-populated bedsit, so far off the rails as to have called a child Stella.

Victoria emerges not reformed exactly, but with a less narrow-minded and egoistical view of the world and with the firm but painful conviction that she must stand on her own feet. *Changing Times* is an engaging argument for feminist progress among fifteen-year-olds. In the final pages of the book, the case becomes a little too pat, with Victoria putting her trust not only in science, but in hard physics over soft biology. The neatness is emphasized by the character of her grandmother, whose amiableness is distorted by the strain of being the only reasonable adult in the book. In the main, however, *Changing Times* is nicely tart, handling the collision between the preoccupations of the schoolchild and the threatening and depressing world of the parents with wit and perceptiveness.

## Real heroes

### Keith Barker

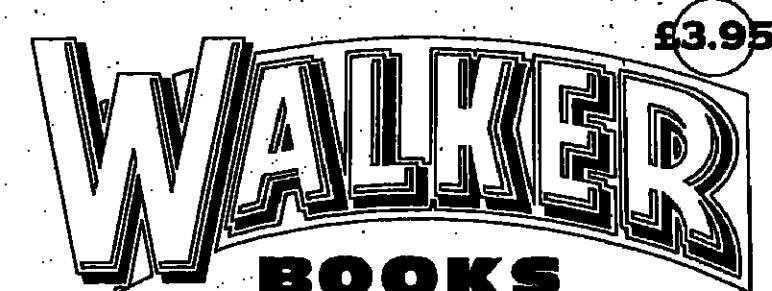
DICK KING-SMITH  
**Harry's Mad**  
*Illustrated by Jill Bennett*  
 115pp. Gollancz. £5.50.  
 057503497 1

Since 1978, when *The Fox Busters* was published, Dick King-Smith has been building up a consistent and well-deserved reputation as a writer of good readable stories for eight to twelve-year olds. Delightful is a much abused word in children's literature but it perfectly describes the warmth and humour of King-Smith's books. These qualities help him to introduce serious ideals such as friendship and courage, without being at all didactic. All his works are good for reading aloud, with plenty of dialogue and short chapters.

The real heroes and heroines of King-Smith's books are not human and the hero of *Harry's Mad* is no exception to this. Madison is an African grey parrot whom Harry inherits (hence the title) from an American great-uncle. This relative was a professor of linguistics, and so it is not surprising that the parrot has the widest of vocabularies, with a taste for anagrams and chess and an encyclopaedic knowledge of recipes. Despite his ability to stay out of trouble (the family cat is kept in check with imitations of Humphrey Bogart), Madison has the misfortune to trap a burglar and is himself captured. His escape and subsequent rescue by a kindly dustman provide the main story, while the hapless Fweddy, a comparatively inarticulate parrot bought by Harry's father as a substitute, gives the book its final twist.

*Harry's Mad* is one of King-Smith's domestic dramas and as such it suffers in comparison with the author's farmyard adventures. It lacks the element of robust reality which prevents his books from becoming soft-centred. The domestic narratives, such as *The Queen's Nose*, can come perilously close to whimsy. Where *Harry's Mad* succeeds is in its strong main character, Madison. Unlike the human characters, who tend to be gentle caricatures, Madison is a fully rounded character, with a quick brain and a sardonic wit.

Jill Bennett's illustrations are among her most imaginative. *Harry's Mad* may not be vintage King-Smith but it is not a disappointment after the excellence of *The Sheep Pig*. It can be guaranteed to make many thousands of children (and not a few adults) very happy.



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*John Coyle*





Some of Maurice Sendak's illustrations to *Nutcracker* by E. T. A. Hoffmann (96pp. Bodley Head, £12.50, 0 370 308409), which will be reviewed shortly.

## A genuine tradition

### Tom Shippey

*Grimms' Other Tales*: A new selection by Wilhelm Hansen  
Translated and edited by Ruth Michaelis-Jena and Arthur Ratcliff  
159pp. Edinburgh: Canongate, £9.50.  
0 86241 066 5

The problems surrounding the bibliography of *Grimms' Fairy Tales* date back to before publication. The Grimms had begun collecting in 1806, under the promptings of Clemens Brentano. By 1810 they had acquired enough stories (some forty-eight) to send a batch to Brentano, though they retained a copy themselves which would become the basis of their 1812 first volume, first edition (eighty-six stories) and 1815 second volume, first edition (seventy stories). After publication they destroyed their manuscripts, however Brentano's copy survived to be edited and published this century. Meanwhile new finds and second thoughts led the Grimms to publish a second edition of the *Kinder und Hausmärchen* in 1819, in which about thirty-four of the 1812/1815 texts had been deleted and forty-eight others added. In subsequent editions up to and including the seventh, of 1857, further tales were added, but also on occasion deleted, so that the eventual 1815 total of 210 is by no means complete (ignoring for instance the thirty-four taken out between 1815 and 1819). One cannot therefore easily say how many *Grimms' Fairy Tales* there are, or were, while since the whole corpus was at all times freely expanded and rewritten it is often hard to say which is the best version of any single one of them. Just to add a final confusion, the Grimms started collecting for a projected third volume in 1815 and from that date received large amounts of material from well-wishers. This they never got round to publishing (except by occasion in later editions of the first two volumes) but preserved carefully.

Ruth Michaelis-Jena's introduction to this reprint of *Grimms' Other Tales* (first published 1956) makes light of all these difficulties. She "had always known", she says, "that there were many tales collected by the brothers which they did not include in the standard editions" (see the seventh), but it was not until she went to "the Grimms' manuscripts" at Tübingen that she actually handled and read them. She was then so impressed that with her husband she translated some fifty of them, remarking that these tales are particularly valuable as "perhaps closer to the original notations than the ones worked over again and again for many editions".

This is a beguiling account, but it gives several false impressions. One is that the tales here were collected in the same sort of way as the better-known ones; another, that they were excluded from the standard editions only by whim or accident. Neither of these notions is really true, and in fact *Grimms' Other Tales* falls into two main groups. Some twenty-three are tales from Grimm informants, often sent in by post after the fame of the *Märchen* was well-established. The Grimms accordingly neither selected nor elicited these, and their links with the main collection may be mere chance. "Beautiful Catharinella", for instance, was sent in by Clemens Brentano's sister Lulu, from Paris, and seems to come from Italy if anywhere. "The Wooden Horse" was taken down in Germany (not by the Grimms), but as it happens is a minor analogue of Chaucer's "Squire's Tale"; "The Crafty Wolf", next to it in this collection, is an oral variant of the *Roman de Renart*. One suspects actually that if Wilhelm Grimm had not had doubts about the *Echtheit* of all these tales he would have found a space for them in one or other late editions.

As for the other, twenty-seven tales, the Grimms did find space for them in one place or another, but then changed their minds and took them out again. Seven were related to "analogue" status and kept in their volumes of *Anmerkungen*. Two appeared in single, late

editions (1840, 1843). Eighteen, however, were all together in the first edition but were among the thirty-four eliminated from the second, for reasons one can often see quite clearly. "Puss in Boots" and "Bluebeard" were Perrault tales which had been translated into German long before and had crept into middle-class maternal repertoires. "Death and the Gooseherd" is a moralistic story copied by Jacob Grimm from a 1663 chapbook, rather like "Two Children in a Famine" and "Our Lady of Sorrows". "The Orge" is a Polyphemus story, while "The Moon and his Mother" (which only made the notes in the first edition) comes from Menander. There seems indeed to be no clear case for eliminating *Herr Flix und Fertig*, or "Master Ever-Ready", which the Grimms got from Sergeant Krause, the retired dragoon, and which is delivered with true military panache. However, on the whole one can only think the Grimms were right. At the start they collected anything at all. After a while they refined their taste towards genuine oral tradition. It is true that by the end Wilhelm Grimm had gone over almost to free composition and deliberate "folkiness" (see S.S. Praver's review of John Ellis, *One Fairy Story Too Many* in the *TLS*, March 30, 1984), but the best conclusion to draw from that is that the standard edition of the *Märchen* ought to be the second, of 1819, not the seventh of 1857.

It is hard to know in the end quite how to rate *Grimms' Other Tales*. They are not very good as tales (though that is the justification Michaelis-Jena gives for them.) They do make one think more kindly of the Grimms, whatever complications they got into later, by letting us see how hard it must have been to sort out a thoroughly contaminated tradition, full of helpful librarians from Wolfenbüttel and eager ladies with shaky memories, and emerge with any recognizable corpus at all. This accidental benefit would, however, have been greater if the tales had been laid out more chronologically and more completely, with a set of first rejects (tales in the 1810 manuscript

but not the first edition), of second rejects (tales in 1812-15 but not in 1819), of later rejects, and of tales from the Grimms' *Nachlass* which may never have been seriously scrutinized at all. But this is to demand a work of pure scholarship. Perhaps one should let it lie by remarking that the notes on the provenance of single tales are admirably clear, and that if there is one thing the Grimms proved, it is that getting tales into print, however imperfectly, is a far better strategy than waiting for a perfect scholarly moment that never comes.

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Westall, Robert. *The Cats of Seroter* 1375  
Woodford, Peggy. *Misfits* 1381

## Letters

### The Time Machine'

Sir, - Umberto Eco offers a classic classification in his essay "Science Fiction and the Art of Conjecture" (November 2), and as a broad definition of science fiction probably few would reject his description of the genre as a literature in which "the art of conjecture is being exercised". It is, however, a pity that the one analysis he makes, in a long article, of a work of science fiction should be so much at fault.

He is at the outset unsure whether Wells's *The Time Machine* may be admitted to the ranks of general acceptance, is rather like doubting whether *The Castle of Otranto* can be recognized as a Gothic story, or *Endymion* given a place in the canon of Romantic verse. His chief ground for this semi-dismissal is that "the visit to the prehistoric people . . . confronts us not so much with conjectures about a nebulous situation as with a free and adventurous fantastication about a lost world . . .". What prehistoric people, one must ask, and what "lost world"? Has Signor Eco by any chance confused H. G. Wells with Conan Doyle? In any case, surely the very essence of *The Time Machine* is conjecture - conjecture as to what kind of future may be extrapolated from what Wells saw as a widening gulf between the "underground" workers and their hedonistic but effete dependants of the "upper world". A "free and adventurous fantastication" would describe well the happenings in Doyle's *The Lost World*, but hardly such episodes in *The Time Machine* as the effectively symbolic visit of the Traveller to the Palace of Green Porcelain, or the Traveller's moving experience of what he terms "The Nemesis of the delicate ones" - both passages, among many others, of sensitive speculative writing.

As for Signor Eco's contention that Wells's novel does not "pose (or not with any profundity) the exclusively science-fictional problem of the temporal paradox", while this would be true of *The Lost World* (where in fact actual time-travel is not at issue), it is very wide of the mark in respect of *The Time Machine*. The problem is there at the beginning of the novel when the Traveller appears tattered and blood-stained on the same day as his disappearance, having spent eight days in the distant future. One of his dinner guests remarks: "What was this time-travelling? A man couldn't cover himself with dust by rolling in a paddock, could he?" It is still there, poignantly, at the end of the novel when the Traveller, before his final disappearance, produces the withered flowers that Weena, whose birth lay over 800,000 years in the future, had put into his pocket. The novel ends with the Narrator finding some bleak comfort in the message and implications of those flowers, as he looks into a "future [that] is still black and blank - is a vast ignorance in a few casual places by the memory of his story".

Wells was indeed artistically alive to the time-travel paradox. His is the science fiction parallel to Coleridge's metaphysical Notebook conjecture ("Aye! and what then?") on the significance of a material flower in the hand of a man waking from a dream of his passage through Paradise in the course of which he has been given the flower as pledge that he had really been there. What veridical evidence might there be, both Wells and Coleridge are asking, for the linkage of disparate, sundered, yet possibly synchronously existent "worlds"?

No; if Signor Eco is looking for a novel to exemplify non-qualification as science fiction, allowing the terms of his own definition, he should perhaps turn his attention away from a misread and consequently misinterpreted version of *The Time Machine*.  
R. V. BAILEY  
1 Val de Mer, Alderney, Channel Islands.

The Oxford Authors series deserves more critical comment than it gets in W. W. Robson's review of the first five titles (October 26).

The first question is whether the series is really necessary - that is, whether people (or institutions) interested in single-volume selections of our classic authors will find it worth buying at thirteen or fifteen pounds a time (paperbacks being inadequate for the wear such a book should get). And the first problem is the previous existence of rival series - that is, the Nonesuch and Reynard libraries, and to a lesser extent the Viking Portable Library. So the first need is for a detailed discussion of the comparative treatment of particular authors by the various series.

Here Robson mentions only the Nonesuch Swift - rightly preferring it to the Oxford volume for including *Gulliver's Travels*, but wrongly preferring the Oxford volume for giving explanatory rather than textual notes. (And here he makes the astonishing remark that Swift was so much a pamphleteer that, "except to the historian, his subjects are no longer of importance"; just after his review appeared, a live broadcast of the *Modest Proposal* on Irish television had to be stopped because of the reaction of the studio audience, and the writings on religion could equally have been written yesterday.) Robson doesn't mention the Reynard Johnson or Wordsworth, one with similar but the other with different principles from the Oxford volumes, or the Viking Hardy.

My own impression so far is that the Oxford Authors aren't nearly as well produced as the Nonesuch and Reynard volumes, most of which are available in good secondhand bookshops, and that they are over-edited in the fussy modern style, compared with the dignified austerity of their predecessors. But the point is that potential purchasers need proper guidance about the rival claims for all of the series of authors in prospect.  
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88 Islington High Street, London N1.

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### 'A Vision of Order'

Sir, - I feel that I must reply to Christopher Hope's review of *A Vision of Order* by Ursula Barnett (November 2). Why is it "a disturbing suggestion that there exists such an entity as 'Black South African Literature' which is to be studied as a thing apart"? The Americans do not find it disturbing to undertake this sort of study in their country. There are many sound reasons, including the consequences of the government's political actions and very old social and other traditions, that warrant such an exercise. Only the bigot can think otherwise.

Bigotry also rears its head in Mr Hope's disparaging remarks about the "Afrikaans literary establishment" and "the tedious and the narrow range produced by that particular form of separate development". This is a preposterous allegation about a vital literature. I for one would not care to exchange Breyten Breytenbach for Oswald Mtshali or Wilma Stockenström for Wally Mongane Serote; nor would I exchange André Brink for Alex la Guma or Etienne Leroux for Ezekiel Mphahlele.

To direct one's revulsion at the political philosophy of a government to the literature produced by individuals living in that country (often individuals as violently opposed to the government as Mr Hope) suggests to me the same mentality which he strives to attack.  
J. J. HUMAN  
PO Box 5050, Cape Town 8000.

### Private Archives

Sir, - I read with interest the article by Roy Foster in your issue of November 9 and especially his reference to "asinine copyright laws". Your readers may not be aware that the Society of Archivists has campaigned consistently for a revision in the law of copyright as it relates to unpublished manuscripts. In its response to the Report of the Whitford Committee (Cmd 6732) the Society supported the recommendation at paragraph 64 of that Report that copyright in unpublished works should expire at the latest fifty years after the author's death. Mr Foster may therefore be assured that the professional body representing custodians of archives throughout Great Britain and the Commonwealth is well aware of the problems that he and many other researchers face, and would welcome support in attempts to ensure that any new copyright act embodies such a provision.  
CYNTHIA M. SHORT  
Society of Archivists, South Yorkshire County Record Office, Ellis Street, Sheffield.

Sir, - The new Oxford Authors series deserves more critical comment than it gets in W. W. Robson's review of the first five titles (October 26).  
The first question is whether the series is really necessary - that is, whether people (or institutions) interested in single-volume selections of our classic authors will find it worth buying at thirteen or fifteen pounds a time (paperbacks being inadequate for the wear such a book should get). And the first problem is the previous existence of rival series - that is, the Nonesuch and Reynard libraries, and to a lesser extent the Viking Portable Library. So the first need is for a detailed discussion of the comparative treatment of particular authors by the various series.

### Qualifications in Librarianship

Sir, - Applications are being invited for the post of Keeper of the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum. A first or second-class honours degree and knowledge of two languages other than English are insisted upon; a qualification in, and experience of, librarianship, is stated to be merely "advantageous".

As the National Art Library, the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum is the major resource for the study of art in this country, and it is a library of international significance, visited by scholars from all over the world. The new Keeper will assume an awesome responsibility, and will inherit grave problems, following years of chronic understaffing, which will require of him or her the utmost professional competence, including awareness of the latest developments in the application of information technology to library systems and information storage and retrieval. The Keeper must be prepared to devote himself or herself to the service of scholarship through the practice of librarianship; furthermore, the Keeper cannot be permitted to hide in an ivory tower: he or she must be able and willing to work closely with colleagues in the British Library, other libraries of national significance in this country, specialist art librarians, and librarians representing national and other libraries abroad.

In short, in addition to any other qualities (which certainly must include both an extensive knowledge of art and an understanding of the nature of scholarship), the Keeper must be a professional librarian of the highest calibre. In Britain we can take pride in the training which we offer to intending librarians, and in the contribution our library schools, and the library profession, has made and is making to the development of librarianship in many parts of the world. Must we betray that tradition by not demanding the very highest standard of professionalism when we appoint to our own most important libraries? If ever a library needed a professional librarian it is the National Art Library, now. Not to appoint such a person would be seriously to hamper art scholarship, and to retard the development of national and international networks of art libraries and data-bases in the service of scholarship, by postponing this key library's attainment of standards of efficiency and effectiveness compatible with the second half of the twentieth century.

PHILIP PACEY.  
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, Section of Art Libraries, Lancashire Polytechnic, Preston, Lancashire.

### 'Prima Donna'

Sir, - Michael Tanner states (November 16) that my book *Prima Donna* preaches a sermon to the effect that "the behaviour of prima donnas [is] an especially blatant manifestation of exotic irrationality".

I must dissociate myself from any such intention. In my introduction I make it plain that the book is devoted to exploding that very stereotype, emphasizing the possibility of "a feminist defence of the prima donna" and point out, among other things, that "acting the prima donna" may have been the only way to avoid exploitation, and that a prima donna's "celebrated whims often had solid reasoning behind them".

I am also surprised that Dr Tanner should think Pasta's "vocal imperfections" to be "highly reminiscent" of Callas's. As I discuss at some length, Pasta is recorded as suffering from a single specific problem - unreliable intonation; while Callas's difficulties were exceptionally various and complex.  
RUPERT CHRISTIANSEN.  
c/o The Bodley Head, Bow Street, London WC2.

Sir, - Gavin Ewart ((November 16) says you can't sing "Love laughs at locksmiths". No, but in the *Liebeslieder* of Brahms you can sing "Zehn eiserne Riegel, das ist ein Spass."  
LUCY MAIR.  
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# COMMENTARY

## Ambiguities of the Thirty Years' War

Philip Brady

BERTOLT BRECHT  
Mother Courage  
Barbican Theatre

Brecht's work on the Berlin *Mother Courage*, the first and probably the most influential of all his Berliner Ensemble productions, has been copiously documented and enshrined, not to say canonized, in what Brecht called the model-book of the production. That book creates problems because Brecht's creative translation of words on the page to words on the stage had produced a seamless join between textual meaning and stage image, and those images – such as Brecht's mastery of theatrical craft – seem so right as to be unchallengeable. As a result *Mother Courage*, of all Brecht's plays, calls up the most precise and inescapable visual pictures: Helene Weigel with *that* wagon, in *those* clothes, with *those* gestures. In a sense, therefore, re-making *Mother Courage* must seem at times more like re-making an old film than re-enacting an old text.

Howard Davies's RSC production does not ignore the visual evidence. It acknowledges Brecht's images where they have that inescapable force: the wagon, the bleak emptiness around it, the counterpoint of rapid action and rare stillness, the sombre colours. But John Napier's set triumphantly builds on what has

gone before. The wagon is a cramped, wooden contraption, not for living in but for trading from: it is rickety and yet indestructible; every hook has a function, every flap or plank its dual purpose; the whole is a monumental piece of space-saving fold-away. And it dominates the production – not simply because it is endlessly, nerve-rackingly, packed up and unpacked (routines which manage to be both mechanical and desperately protective), but because it is physically part of a greater machine. It swivels at one end of a long beam which has a central fulcrum mid-stage and, at the opposite end, a light three-wheeled object with a mast, a half-frivolous, half-sinister thing not unlike one of Tinguely's ambiguous constructions. A vertical rod connects this to a huge horizontal cog-wheel suspended over the stage. It is an ingenious way of suggesting that Courage's wagon does not exist in isolation, that capitalism (even Courage's small-time profiteering) and war are indivisible.

Brecht, who subtitled his play "a chronicle of the Thirty Years' War", was at pains to point up the episodic character of his chronicle, the sharp, even paradoxical contrasts between one precisely located scene and the next. Howard Davies tilts the balance away from historical chronicle in order to express Brecht's contradictions by other means. Clearly the entire stage-machine is crucial in this; so too are the groupings and re-groupings of the actors, creating at times pockets of calm and incongruous

stability on the very edge of chaos. Those groupings can have a stark eloquence (Courage and her daughter, utterly weary, silently – almost hungrily – watching a young peasant woman wash her hair) or they can make a more complex statement (Courage's swaggering son Elif recounts his bloodthirsty exploits while, unseen by him, his Mother plucks – not quite impassively – a capon).

It is difficult in so richly integrated a production to separate sights from sounds, people from things. But those people, if they are trapped together in a web of animosity and dependence, are still individuals, each separately and differently ravaged by war. And they have, as individuals, many expressive, ambiguous moments: Trevor Peacock's cook, pulling himself together for one last tired piece of clowning when he sings his final song; Stephen Moore's Chaplain, in what is another complex, subtly paced scene, playing dice, while Mother Courage checks her inventory, and intoning his hair-raising ironies about war with a mixture of schoolmasterly waggishness and profound bitterness.

In the visual imagery of this most visual play Courage's mute daughter is central. She exists, so to speak, only when seen. Zoë Wanamaker suggests without a trace of sentimentality what has been stifled. She is crushed, but she snarls like a trapped animal, and when she finally breaks her silence, drumming out her warning message perilously high up on a hanging, shat-

tered fragment of roof, she becomes the very epitome of triumph against the odds, abstracted in her muteness and yet involved, very frail and yet very strong.

At the heart of it all, banishing those old pictures of Helene Weigel, there is Judi Dench's Courage. Her visual presence is unforgettable: under a shock of almost punk red hair – all that remains of the woman in her – she chews, scowls and stares. She rocks on her feet, shoulders bent, endlessly hitching up her huge old great-coat, hands deep in pockets, spolling for a fight. And there is fight, as well as great tenderness, in her gravelly Cockney voice. When she stands on her wagon she seems bigger than when she is on the ground. When she sits on it or near it she almost relaxes, but the wariness is always there, and the stony impassivity of one who, as she puts it, cannot afford a private life. It is a performance full of contrasts – she is witty in a curiously unhumorous way, and she is so coarsened that, faced with her daughter's corpse, even her tenderness is ham-fisted.

One risk – and that a notorious one – has been avoided. Faced with such consummate nastiness no audience is going to subvert Brecht's aims by shedding tears for this Courage as she shuffles off to her wagon for the last time, her three children dead. Indeed, in this and other important senses this is still Brecht's *Mother Courage*. But it is no longer the somewhat neutralized modern classic. It is brand new, magnificently so.

## Making tracks

Pia Pera

STEPHEN POLIAKOFF  
Breaking the Silence  
The Pit, Barbican

*The Jazz Singer*, the Warner Brothers movie with Vitaphone sound-effects, provoked a furore in New York in October 1927, while in the Soviet Union experiments in sound were still being carried out – both in Moscow, by Tager, and in Leningrad, by Shorin. "Of all the arts, for us cinema is the most important", Lenin told Lunacharsky, the Commissar of Enlightenment, when nationalizing in April 1919 the Soviet film industry. A victory against America in the sound race could have been paraded as the triumph of socialism over the capitalist hydra.

A teenaged Stephen Poliakoff heard from his grandmother that under a more auspicious star the first talkie could have been produced by his grandfather, Nikolay. Instead, this eccentric and until then Anglomaniac Moscow Jew was forced into exile in England, a country where "they have a terror of everything foreign... and the coffee is disgusting, undrinkable". As for Russia, it was left to enjoy the "advantages of backwardness".

In Poliakoff's *Breaking the Silence*, Aleksey Verkoff (John Kane), a Commissar of Labour bubbling with proletarian geniality; fancies himself as the beneficent wizard of the Revolution. He forces the outraged Nikolay (Daniel Massey) to become Telephone Surveyor of the Northern Railway: a sinecure by which Verkoff, with his knack for talent-spotting, wants to spare him.

The first act deals with appearances, almost like a Soviet play on the emancipation of women. As late as 1920, when the action begins, Nikolay is still so ignorant of how things have changed that he reminds one of *Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*, Lev Kuleshov's farce on the misapprehensions of an American tourist. He comes across as not much more than a talented snob; anxious to produce in the talking pictures the invention which will grant him access to the aristocracy of the spirit. But the self-suppressing etiquette demanded by Nikolay to reign the gay quickly breaks down when the spies assigned to the family shrink from the grandeur of their Moscow residence to the size of a railway carriage. His wife Eugenia (the increasingly vigorous Emma Jones) frees herself from the thickiness of summer stockings: this she does with the air of relish of

she comes to life there is an explosion of the energy which had been repressed by the stultifying inactivity imposed on her by her husband.

The Revolution with its impact on domestic life, summed up in the railway carriage, transforms the protagonists: unsuspected qualities and hidden resources come to the surface. The features of his ancestral tsadikim shine through Nikolay once he is divested of the paraphernalia of his gentry impersonation. Amid the "farical conditions in which history is being made" he retains his integrity and there is a kind of folly bordering on the sacred in his passion for the truth and his impermeability to worldly concerns.

As the family leave the country, and the guards express doubts as to Nikolay being the Telephone Surveyor of Northern Railway (he has his diamonds with him), Emma Jones delivers a splendid performance, blurring out with the urgency of desperation production figures and statistics to save her husband from the firing squad. Lies and deception have become a basic survival skill, one realizes. Comments about the new régime are never more than whispered, which is a great relief as things Russian are all too often the haven of the trite. Ron Daniels's direction shows mastery control of two different tempi: the violent movement of the historical drama and the slow pace of psychological growth. As human meaning accrues to the latter, the numinous Revolution recedes into the background, splendidly incidental until the tragedy of the whole family's exile sounds a final note of grief.

What is discreetly suggested is this well-balanced appraisal of the new order: is there something must have gone wrong if there is no place for talent. The son, Master Alexander (Jason Lake) destroys his father's scientific equipment when he is tantalizingly close to the achievement of his goal – by implication an indictment of a family where the patriarch is the only one to know the meaning of actions, who can be "served, but never helped". No wonder his conformist and unimaginative son can be easily brainwashed into a potential Pavlik Morozov, the peasant boy who during collectivization denounced his father for hoarding grain. The one became a hero, the other was shot.

Movies remain, for the time being – 1924 silent; yet this hardly matters when the final exile is shaded with optimism: the silence which had paralysed the family is broken. With the philosophical detachment of the scientist Nikolay lets down "a way was found of relin-

## The chronicler of non-events

Robert Snell

James Tissot  
Barbican Art Gallery, until January 20

The largest ever exhibition of Tissot's work can currently be seen at the multi-level Barbican Centre. Tissot's preferred level was somewhere comfortably above the water-line; although some of his protagonists favour the floor (preferably carpeted) or the ground (preferably spread with rugs), the painter's own viewpoint is determinedly eye-level. Except perhaps in one instance (the etched memory of a French victim of the Siege of Paris), his eyes, unlike Degas's, never stray far from the horizontal.

Initially, they were directed towards a highly detailed and stylized medieval and religious past; the figures have a sort of Pre-Raphaelite stiffness, which possibly reflects Tissot's early love for things English: he lived in London from 1871 to 1882. His modern-life women – for women are his principal subject, the bearers of his meaning – develop during the 1860s a glazed, heavy-lidded look, their lethargy partly reminiscent of Rossetti, partly something all their own. Yet they seem to want to be active: one moment they recline in or slide floor-

wards out of armchairs, at the next they take aim at the rifle range, or, in the case of a later, forthright if unlikely "Femme préhistorique" (not in catalogue), dominate the primeval forest.

The great game of the exhibition is, of course, spot the dress. Most of the figures in the sumptuous boating and pleasure pictures of the early and mid-1870s seem intent on playing their parts in the game to passive perfection. We can trace, thanks to her striped outfit in exhibit 64, "Boarding the Yacht", the history of a girl tired of boating on the river who, leaving in her wake a disconsolate aquatic chaperone (exhibit 60), moves on to bigger boats, pausing only to change her hat and deposit her red tartan rug. This second boating party promises to be as dull and laconic as the first; she does, however, start a stolid liaison with one of the ship's officers (exhibit 61), thoughtfully having retrieved her tartan rug first, and changed hats again. There may yet be further consolations for the expressionless Captain: he resurfaces later in the exhibition, but this time with a leading role in the Lord Mayor's Show (exhibit 116).

These deeply puzzling pictures are in no sense moral tales; a nineteenth-century Hogarth would have left us in less doubt as to what everybody was thinking (and would cer-

## The best of British?

Richard Combs

The Killing Fields  
Waver, Leicester Square

Towards the end of *The Killing Fields* there is a scene which gives a sudden, obviously unintended twist to the film's sense of perspective. Its background scene of battle which shimmers for a moment with greater immediacy, performs a little leap into the foreground, and then drops back into the film's timeless mosaic dream-land lives and landscapes. It comes after the fall of Cambodia to the Khmer Rouge, after the separation of two journalist friends, New York Times reporter Sydney Schanberg (Sam Waterston) and his Cambodian guide/interpreter/factotum Dith Pran (Haing S. Ngor), and the latter's escape from the notorious "re-education" of the new régime. Pran is making his way towards Thailand when there is another military and political upheaval: the Vietnamese, apparently provoked by Khmer Rouge raids, invade Cambodia, and suddenly Soviet jets are attacking these latterly victorious Communist insurgents.

The reverberations of the event, its simple newsworthiness – and for a moment the film seems to have been interrupted by a flash bulletin – can't be contained by, or fitted into, the personal story of Schanberg and Pran. But the film bulldozes on, pretending that the final mission of this pair does contain the history and hopes of multitudes, by the simple expedient of overlaying it with John Lennon's banal plea to international understanding, "Imagine". This may seem to make too much of what is just background detail, the kind of material which any story with a historical setting might use. But *The Killing Fields* is a peculiar concoction. It is dealing in very recent history – part of the shock of the Vietnamese invasion scene is that something which seems to have happened yesterday could already be selected in that most slow-moving of forms, the big-budget, green spectacular. And the personal story taking place against this background is itself true, derived from Schanberg's own account of how he worked with Pran in Cambodia. Yet guilty for his failure to get him out with the last American airlift, and subsequently spent years after his own return to the United States trying to find him.

The foreground and background should be carefully related. In fact, no illumination is given either direction. Before the fall of Cambodia, Schanberg and Pran appear to have a professional relationship. No great friendship is evident – though the film suggests Pran and Ngor have such a bond to the end of their lives. The film's structure is backed structure. The Cambodian seems very much to play coolie to the American, an aspect which is unacknowledged at the personal level or in terms of any wider consideration of the Western presence in South-East Asia. The film's basis in fact – even the fact that it is about newspapermen – prompts a loose, journalistic descriptiveness in the scenes of the war leading to the capture of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge. It begins with a self-contained episode in which Pran manages to smuggle Schanberg into a Cambodian town which has accidentally been bombed by the Americans. This strikes a note vaguely critical of American involvement, but political connections really go no further here than personal ones. The film is made up of self-contained episodes, isolated set-pieces – like the rush to get Pran's family on the airlift – which are triggered without narrative rhyme or reason, simply to sustain the illusion that there is a narrative.

So *ad hoc* and piecemeal is the film's structure that it comes as something of a surprise, halfway through, to realize that the Schanberg-Pran relationship is supposed to be its sustaining thread. Once they are physically separated – Schanberg to a Journalist of the Year award in New York, Pran to a Khmer Rouge labour camp – the thread is stretched beyond breaking point. Everything we learn about the characters is such random information that it never coalesces into a theme: bachelor Schanberg lives with his sister (was there, then, something more passionate involved in his friendship with Pran?), that he feels guilty over Pran is only conveyed through a contrived scene with an ex-Cambodian colleague. Meanwhile, as if to make up for this underlying lack of coherence or direction, the camera is forever tracking in and around these non-events, suggesting that it at least has somewhere urgent to go.

Given the extraordinary hyperbole already expended on the film (as a coronation of British Film Year), and on its producer David Putnam, what *The Killing Fields* represents may be more revealing than what it contains. The limp way it is organized round its factual basis perhaps caters to an innate British distrust of cinema – the tendency to favour documentary, or documentary appearances, so that the less the "facts" seem to have been tampered with (untouched by metaphor, allegory, or an imaginative theme) the better. Putnam's genius, perhaps, is the implicit recognition that the British cinema has always failed because, as Truffaut remarked, the very concept is a contradiction in terms. His success is therefore a measure of his having delivered what the British really want, a kind of non-event which is evident – though the film suggests Pran and Ngor have such a bond to the end of their lives.

# COMMENTARY



Detail from Tissot's "The Captain and the Mate", 1873.

tainly have painted a dirtier Thames). By the mid-1870s, Tissot's protagonists begin to look a bit less bored, and a bit more frustrated. A subject matter, that of lovers' unspoken *ennui*, and of women precluded from love by convention or family, emerges more clearly: Tissot is the painter of non-events. The tartan rug, which also reappears, now seems to play a more positive role, and to offer its own dumb comment. After the death of his English mistress, Kathleen Newton, in 1882, Tissot returned to Paris, and the scale of his ambitions changed. He had by now done some fine illustrations to the Goncourts' *Renée Maupérin*; his brushwork and palette in the early 1880s show the influence of the Impressionist Manet; he embarked on his series of large oil paintings, "La Femme à Paris", which, if not a success with the Parisian public, was nevertheless a serious attempt, in the shadow of the Naturalist novel, to analyse middle-class or aspiring middle-class woman in society. The problem in these, as in very many of Tissot's works, is the problem of his subjects themselves, what Baudelaire would have deemed an excessive and debilitating faith in appearances. When

Tissot's need to find visual definition for everything militates against the portrayal of character and relationship, as it usually does, he is left with no recourse but to mild caricature. He was, as the exhibition shows, at home in this particular field; his paintings of women are most poignant when most personal, for example some of his portraits of Mrs Newton.

Tissot ends his career as a born-again Pre-Raphaelite, of the Holman-Hunt school, in a series of intense biblical illustrations. The Nile is substituted for the Thames, the rigging of dhows for that of Whistlerian sailing ships, but the tartan rug has finally disappeared for ever. These works brought him further fortune and respect; he has never really been forgotten since, especially in England. He is now being taken very seriously again, and rightly: not because he ever was a true poet in paint (in the sense that contemporaries like Degas or Renoir could be), but because, largely in spite of himself, his horizontal and meticulous view of the bourgeoisie of his times offers, beneath its great surface appeal, perspectives so odd or disquieting that we, in our own times, may not always care to look down them.

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## Opera on its uppers

Jonathan Keates

G. F. HANDEL  
Radamisto and Imeneo  
Sadler's Wells

The Handel Opera Society, now at something of a crossroads in its fortunes, has been bravely unmasking concealed treasures for nearly three decades. The productions, it is true, teeter on precipices of amateur dramatics (the chorus members seldom fail to suggest that someone out there knows them) and visual standards are often embarrassing to an extent that demands indulgence rather than indignation. Yet conviction both in the stageworthiness of the operas and, by implication, in the validity of the medium in general has again and again carried the day.

It was successful once more in this year's offerings. Spared the hitherto customary staged oratorio (who can recall without a shudder the blue nylon and lute *Esther*, the Hollywood boudoir *Belshazzar* or the stars twinkling on Sheila Armstrong's hips in *Sampson*?) we were given instead two eloquently contrasted pieces from earlier phases of Handel's theatrical career, one a full-scale heroic melodrama, the other a comedy aptly described in a contemporary advertisement as "the operetta".

*Radamisto*, a tale of love and politics in classical Armenia, was Handel's first contribution to the subscription seasons initiated in 1719 at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket under the misleading title of the Royal Academy of Music. The librettos were mainly adaptations, by the theatre poets Haym and Rolli, of current Italian texts; tailored, as such, to suit local exigencies, their plot and character-interests are often obscured and in certain cases (notably *Alessandro* and *Talano*) dramatic consistency is almost entirely set at naught. Is there, perhaps, some connection between the sturdiness, in contrast, of *Radamisto*, with its clear narrative lines and strongly etched protagonists, and the fact that Handel in 1720 was as yet relatively unhampered by the demands

of querulous soloists, backstage intrigue or a financially embarrassed management?

Tom Hawkes's production brought out the vigour and passion while always remaining sensitive to effect in such airs as "Ombra cara", a locus classicus of Baroque operatic pathos. With one negligible exception, the soloists showed to what extent Handelian drama relies on vocal intelligence as opposed to mere attractive warbling. Sandra Browne was a dignified Radamisto, less of a spent force than some of her newest detractors are keen to insist, the voice a trifle frayed and plummy in the hero's more tempestuous moments but beautifully placed for the resigned gravity at the heart of "Qual nave smarrita". Kim Begley brought a buoyant nonchalance to the well-exposed tenor role of the tyrant Tiridate.

Peter Rice's hideous designs, mingling the Civil Wars with a 1950s nightclub, were an archaeological curiosity which had nothing to do with the work. Better by far, in their unobtrusiveness, were Adele Angard's sets for *Imeneo*. This, the slightest of Handel's stage pieces, baffled the London public before whom it failed in 1740 and has intrigued commentators ever since. The flimsy plot, in which the hero's Rosmene is required to choose between Imeneo and Tirinto, subjecting them both to her mock mad scene, must doubtless have appealed to the composer's famously dry sense of humour, and the music's more subtly tongue-in-cheek moments make us understand why Wagner should have described him, with grudging admiration, as "the Rossini of his day".

*Imeneo* is an ideal choice for an opera company on its uppers, and the production sensibly concentrated on throwing the singers into tasteful relief. Performers were allowed to take a bow after their arias, a feature which, shocking as it may appear to our post-Wagnerian high-mindedness, brooded nothing of the music's impact. Charles Farncombe's musical direction of both operas showed him more at home in the expansive paragraphs of *Radamisto* than in the lighter footed *Imeneo*, where his tendency to hustle Handel along gave the performances an unnecessary breathlessness and sank one or two of the music's more delicate touches without trace. Is it *l'es-majesté* finally to suggest that the society, in taking stock of its position on the eve of the composer's tercentenary, might choose to commit him, if only for a season, to younger and more adventurous producers, designers and conductors?

The Royal Opera is to present a new production of Handel's *Sampson* in February.

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# Managing to deceive ourselves

Jon Elster

DAVID PEARS  
Motivated Irrationality  
258pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £14.95.  
0195246625

In *The Terrible Secret* Walter Laqueur set out to investigate why the eye-witness reports of Hitler's genocide of the Jews failed to have the impact one would expect them to have. Essentially, his argument is that the recipients of this news thought or acted irrationally. By late 1942, he writes, "while many Germans thought that the Jews were no longer alive, they did not necessarily believe that they were dead". Similar paradoxes arise when we try to understand the failure of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe to flee their country or otherwise resist what lay in store for them. Laqueur quotes from the diary of the Polish resistance leader Emmanuel Ringelblum: "it will remain completely incomprehensible why Jews from villages around Hrubieszow were evacuated under a guard of Jewish policemen. Not one of them escaped, although all of them knew where and towards what they were going."

To explain irrational belief formation and irrational action – or failure to act – we may invoke the notions of self-deception and weakness of the will. This, however, would really be a case of *obscurum per obscurius*. When described in a certain way, these phenomena appear so paradoxical that doubts have been raised as to their very possibility. Before they can be used to explain other events, they must themselves be much more thoroughly understood. David Pears's *Motivated Irrationality* is a major step towards this goal. By careful conceptual analysis he argues for the view that, properly described, there is nothing impossibly paradoxical about these phenomena. People can deceive themselves, and can even have a motive for doing so; they can and do act against their own better judgment.

To convey the flavour of the book, one may cite some of the names that appear most frequently in its pages. Pears draws heavily on Freud, Aristotle and Donald Davidson; on Freud for setting up the problems and for some hints towards the 'correct solutions'; on Aristotle for providing us with the 'right' language in which to describe mental phenomena and their link to action; and on Davidson for his pioneering studies on weakness of will and 'paradoxes of irrationality'. On the other hand, Pears is more critical of the analyses of Sartre, Elizabeth Anscombe and R. M. Hare, Sartre's famous criticism of Freud's theory of the unconscious is shown, I believe conclusively, to be invalid. Anscombe is taken to task for the notion that actions are susceptible to being true and false, so that an agent acting against his own better judgment actually contradicts himself by so acting. Pears objects, finally, to Hare's arguments against the possibility of what Pears calls "last-ditch conscious akrasia" (of which more later). His comments on the substantive views of Anscombe and Hare are, unfortunately, embedded in extensive discussions of their interpretations of Aristotle. I fear that this will have the predictable effect of making the book less attractive to psychologists and psychiatrists, who like their arguments straight, with no chase. Another feature of the book will contribute to the same effect. Although almost never obscure, it is quite dense and difficult to follow. Arguments that on a first or second reading appear elliptical, can usually be unpacked, but with some effort. Although I believe that those who make the effort will find it worth their while, many readers will be deterred.

This is all the more to be deplored, since Pears is addressing issues of central importance to empirical psychology. He has, moreover, a more than casual acquaintance with cognitive psychology which helps him identify the province of the mind in which his subject-matter is located. By and large, he is also able to resist the philosopher's fallacy of armchair theorizing. He knows well enough that "when philosophers set up their examples, it is only too easy for them to project their own assumptions onto the characters that they create".

The book divides into two parts, of roughly equal length. The first deals with various forms of irrational belief formation. Here the emphasis is on *motivated* irrationality, i.e. self-deception and related "hot" phenomena, but there is also much useful discussion of the "cold" perversions of reasons that are at the centre of much recent cognitive psychology.

The second half considers *akrasia*, or acting against one's better judgment. The two topics are interrelated, since self-deception about what is one's better judgment can facilitate *akrasia*. Yet the focus is on the cases of *akrasia* that cannot be explained by cognitive deficiencies. In my opinion, the chapters on irrational belief are more exciting, more controversial and more obscure than the treatment of *akrasia*. Other readers, whose interest is more squarely in conceptual analysis, may judge differently.

There is self-deception when a person thinks a certain belief is (inductively or logically) unfounded, yet holds that belief and does so for a motive. If only the first two conditions are satisfied, we have the well-known, non-paradoxical phenomenon that people may entertain incompatible beliefs simply because they belong to different realms of their life. If only the second and third conditions obtain, we have wishful thinking, a phenomenon whose existence Pears is committed to denying. This implication may count against his solution of the paradox of irrationality, as I shall argue. First, however, the bare bones of that solution must be indicated.

The paradox of irrationality is the following: how can a person adopt a belief in the teeth of the evidence, even if he has a motive for doing so? We may deceive other people, by hiding from them the evidence that would lead them in the correct direction, but we cannot similarly fool ourselves, or so it would appear. Yet everyday and clinical experience seems massively to demonstrate that self-deception is possible. How do we go about it? Pears, following Davidson, suggests that the wish to believe in the unsupported belief recedes from the main mental system and sets up a small subsystem which also includes the recognition that the belief is not supported by evidence. This subsystem behaves in a quasi-altruistic fashion towards the main system; it tries, as it were, to foist the belief on the main system, given its knowledge that the main system wants to believe it. Or, more precisely, the subsystem refrains from preventing the formation of the irrational belief in the main system, since it knows that the latter wants to believe it and wants its wishes to be satisfied.

The details of this solution are intriguing, intricate, and will no doubt be the subject of a great many comments in philosophical journals. Here I only want to consider two broader issues: the relation between self-deception and wishful thinking, and the nature of the subsystem in question.

Wishful thinking, if there is such a thing, would differ from self-deception in the lack of any mental division. When we deceive ourselves, we somehow, somewhere, remain in possession of the justified belief and yet, somehow, elsewhere, adopt a belief contrary to it. Wishful thinking (in my stipulated sense of the term) would involve going directly for the preferred belief, without pausing to see whether the evidence on the whole justifies it. Hence it might happen, accidentally, that the belief formed by wishful thinking is the very same belief that one would have formed by impartial consideration of the evidence, had that operation not been preempted. On Pears's theory this could not happen, since the wish to believe is permissive rather than productive. Its operation is a failure to intervene rationally, not an irrational intervention. His theory has no place for superfluous irrationality, or the kind that would occur if the wishful thinking just happened to produce the rational belief.

I wonder, however, whether it does justice to the phenomena. From my armchair, at least, it appears to me that we often form the belief before we consider the evidence for it. The parts of the evidence that support the belief spontaneously acquire particular salience or force, without any other part of the mind simultaneously evaluating them at their proper

weight. Perhaps we know "deep down" that this way of forming beliefs is not rational, but this is not to say that we know the belief to be irrational – which, in fact, it need not be. A special, important case is the process of belief-formation that operates by making correct inferences from the evidence, but stopping the collection of evidence at the first point where the net balance of information favours the view one wishes to be true. One may have no grounds in this case for believing the view to be irrational, and it might well be quite unobjectionable; yet I submit that this is a case of motivated irrationality.

A more far-reaching question is that of the nature of the subsystem which is involved in self-deception. Pears stresses that this system must have its own internal rationality: it is an efficient, quasi-altruistic manipulator of the main system. Yet for his argument to go through it must also be endowed with a variety of features that would almost turn it into a homunculus – a consequence that, in my view, is strongly undesirable. The subsystem must have all sorts of attitudes – beliefs and desires – concerning the main system. It must, in other words, be capable of having *representations* of the main system. Moreover, it must be able to weigh and choose between alternative ways of satisfying the wishes of the main system. To my mind, these requirements almost inexorably imply that the subsystem must have some kind of consciousness. Now, Pears does not deny that the subsystem may be part of consciousness. On this point he explicitly departs from Freud. He also argues that sometimes the subsystem may be part of the Freudian preconscious, i.e. not included with the main system in one self-monitoring system. In my opinion, both of these possibilities are quite unattractive. Since Pears believes that in the really difficult cases of self-deception we must locate the subsystem in the preconscious, I shall focus on this case.

Our notion of consciousness has, I believe, two main features. It includes both the capacity for having representations of absent objects, and a peculiar kind of self-transparency. By contrast, the Freudian unconscious, on one plausible reading, involves neither feature. It is essentially a mechanism for climbing pleasure-gradients, with no capacity for representing temporally or spatially distant objects. Also, its operation can be mechanical and unnoticed. A non-Freudian example would be the unconscious adaptation of what one wants to what one can possibly get. Pears suggests that there is room and need for a mental operation that has the first, but not the second of the defining features of consciousness: the capacity for representing and even choosing between abstract options, but not for monitoring its own operations. Or, if such a mental operation has some kind of internal consciousness, it would be "buried alive", and hence constitute an almost vacuous hypothesis.

To persuade us of the reality and power of the preconscious, Pears offers the following example: "a girl who persuaded herself that her lover was not unfaithful might avoid a particular café because she believed that she might find him there with her rival, and yet she might not be conscious of this belief". But he offers no evidence – beyond armchair theorizing – for believing in the existence of this phenomenon; or for thinking that cases that apparently conform to this description cannot be otherwise explained. Moreover, I think the concept of such a well-endowed preconscious is inherently implausible. It would be doubly detached from anything tangible: from its objects, since it relates to them only in the mode of representation; and from its subject, since it would not be within the scope of consciousness. True, this is more an expression of conceptual weakness than an actual argument against Pears's proposal. I simply do not believe that we can get very far in this inherently elusive domain by inferring unobservable mental entities from phenomena whose very description tends to involve a great deal of implicit theory.

The treatment of *akrasia* breaks less new ground, although the ground broken is covered more thoroughly. The central question is whether it is possible to act consciously against one's own better judgment, while remaining fully aware of the relevant features of the situation, fully committed to one's value-judgment and free of any compulsive urges. Here Pears

parts company with a distinguished line of philosophers – from Socrates to Davidson and Hare – who have denied the very possibility of this phenomenon. In arguing for the view that it is not only possible, but not at all uncommon, he relies on a distinction between weak and strong valuations of action. Weak valuation is expressed in "mere preference", strong valuation in judgments about the long-term interest of the agent or the interest of people other than the agent. Pears claims that Davidson's argument against the possibility of last-ditch *akrasia* works only because he limits himself to weak valuation. Hare, on the other hand, explicitly considers strong valuation, but his argument fails.

According to Hare, an agent who is fully aware and fully committed, yet acts against his own better judgment, does so because he is unable to do otherwise. The force of strong valuation is such as "to overcome all internal obstacles except sheer psychological impossibility". This, of course, does not presuppose universal determinism which, as Pears notes, "is a theory that produces overkill in this area". Rather the moral weakness is due to a specific kind of failing, an inability to resist temptation. It is worth quoting in full Pears's objections to this view, since they also serve as the pivotal arguments for his own theory:

First, weakness is not the only cause of such lapses . . . It is easy to be misled by the assumption, the weakness is the only cause, and to infer that an agent who is too weak to resist a temptation is psychologically unable to resist it, just as a Japanese wrestler, who is not strong enough to push his opponent out of the ring, is physically unable to push him out.

Second, although some addicts in some circumstances are literally unable to resist temptation, it does not follow that this is the explanation of all, or even of typical, apparent cases of conscious last-ditch *akrasia*. In fact, the claim is self-evidently implausible once its extreme character is clearly understood.

Third, even if we always had to believe the agent's excuse, "I could not resist temptation", there would be no need to suppose that it always means, "I was literally impossible for me to resist it". There is a common use of "I could not" in which it only means "Because it was difficult, I did not succeed", just as "I could" often means "I did succeed in spite of the difficulty".

This, to me, is distinctly unsatisfactory. The first argument relies on analogy, the second is mere assertion and the third a linguistic sleight-of-hand. I have more belief in Davidson's proposal, that we must look at the way in which desires cause actions. In cases of *akrasia* it is the causal wiring between the desires and the action which is at fault: the desire which according to the agent's judgment is the weaker wins out because it somehow blocks the other desires from operating. To that extent it causes behaviour, not qua reason for action, but qua sheer psychic turbulence. At the moment of action, this is not within the control of the agent – although there are a number of times prior to the action at which he might have caused it to be in accordance with his better judgment. True, Davidson's account is not without difficulties of its own, notably his notorious and self-confessed inability to clarify what it means for a set of beliefs and desires to cause an action "in the right way". Yet I believe that his is surely the correct language for dissecting the problem, more useful than appeals to the way in which we use phrases like "I could" or "I could not".

In particular, Davidson's approach holds out more promise for a collaboration between philosophy and psychology. In stark contrast to his treatment of self-deception, Pears's discussion of weakness of will does not at all consider the important work that psychologists and psychiatrists have done in this area.

It is inevitable that a book of this scope and ambition will be controversial, and give rise to objections of the kind put forward here. What ought not to be controversial, however, is that David Pears has given us an outstandingly lucid and intelligent account of matters of the highest importance. It is the first comprehensive and unified treatment of the paradoxes of irrational thought and irrational action. As I tried to indicate in my opening paragraph, these are not puzzles inhabited by philosophers, but problems of deep human significance. Even though we may never be able to get rid of our irrational propensities, knowledge of how they operate may at the very least enable us to take some rational precautions.

## The temperature rises

Brian Case

JIM GODBOLT  
A History of Jazz in Britain 1919-50  
360p. Quartet. £14.95.  
070024520  
JIMMY TURNER  
Hot Air, Cool Music  
360p. Quartet. £9.95.  
070024598

Any history of jazz in Britain which ends at 1950 necessarily limits itself to a recital of anecdote, newspaper clipping and social attitudes since the music itself, an enthusiastic but inferior copy of American models, is hardly worthy of serious evaluation. Jim Godbolt's approach is as breezy as a riverboat shuffle, one on the look-out for the preposterous detail and the opportunity for raffish reminiscence. Had he continued beyond his chosen period, he might have found this jocularity inappropriate, since the 1950s witnessed the gestation of British jazz musicians into the world league, while "the tragic deaths of talented musicians established a British pantheon of jazz martyrs."

What pre-war Britain did pioneer, however, was the querulous business of jazz appreciation, and Godbolt is thorough in chronicling its difficult birth. Misinformation abounded. As André Hodeir pointed out, "anyone who tries to place jazz in the perspective of European culture without first revising his traditional aesthetic habits has scarcely any chance of understanding it". Most of the press condemned jazz as a noise, rhythm as morally undermining, and black musicians as crude savages. *Melody Maker* in 1927 tipped the now-forgotten white trumpeter Ted Schilling over Louis Armstrong, and salted his "hot" reviews throughout the decade with reference to "coons", "real jazz atmosphere" and "Massa Ellington".

Even more bigoted, the *Daily Herald* reported that Armstrong at the London Palladium "stared and behaves like an untrained gorilla. It might have come straight from the African jungle." In the early days, only Ernest Ansermet showed any grasp of the aesthetics of improvisation in a celebrated review of Sidney Bechet's music.

If Armstrong and Ellington had trouble finding hotel accommodation in London because of their colour, neither had difficulty in winning fans, and, Godbolt tells us, they retained their support despite a seventeen-year ban on visiting American jazz musicians imposed by the Ministry of Labour and the British Musicians Union. Denied live music and reliant upon local imitators and records, the British jazz fan – like the train-spotter – developed an insular and pedantic interest in compiling inventories of recording dates, personnel and matrix numbers. The purist and the discographer took over the interpretation of the most impassioned and spontaneous of art forms. Godbolt quotes Ernest Borneman on the subject of British Rhythm Clubs, at which "the record becomes more important than the music".

Bruce Turner, a professional jazz musician for the past forty years, has clearly smarted under this régime. His dislike of the pundits registers in every chapter of his autobiography. For him, the 1930s were halcyon days when a youngster could follow his musical instincts: "we hadn't yet started to bow to the 'experts'". On that day, all that was best in jazz would shrivel and die. "In fact, far from dying, jazz is currently experiencing a boom, while Turner's views seem very much to spring from the 1940s when Sidney Finkelstein's fine work of punditry, *Jazz: A people's music*, held sway. Divisiveness is the British disease, it seems, and it does not lend itself to the laconic witticisms of Chicago bandleader Eddie Condon: "Do I tell him how to jump on a grape?" was Condon's response to critical advice from the Frenchman Hugues Panassié.

Godbolt and Turner cross paths in each other's books since jazz in Britain is a minority affair. Where the former, remembering the abusive wars between traditional jazz revivalists and emerging modernists, is amused, the latter is not. Turner upset the purists by playing

Haggart frantically whistles through his teeth, creating a memorable sound of mounting desperation.

Duke Ellington put ideas into his soloists' heads, Benny Goodman encouraged virtuosity, but Crosby offered opportunities for his instrumentalists to grab as they could. Chilton is skilful at unpicking arrangements, spotting moments when pianist Jess Stacy saves a banal vehicle with an unrestricted chorus or, conversely, Fazola surprises by repeating the melody when he might be expected to improvise. Like most 1930s band-leaders, Crosby depended upon residences on sponsored radio shows which demanded a popular approach. Vocalists took on great importance. Judy Garland, Kay Starr and Doris Day ("tall and beautiful with the usual voice", according to Leonard Feather in 1940) were all briefly featured. Unlike Goodman, Crosby made no attempt to swing the ballads, so that by the end of the decade the "traditional" roaming clarinet and tangle trombone were heavily constrained by the choir effects of contemporary settings. All of which put pressure on a rhythm section happiest with the two-beat style of the old small-group music. Bauduc attempted to create diversions with 'intrusive fill-ins on blocks and riffs. In the age of Gene Krupa, this was not enough.

The historical objection to Crosby's bands – that they substituted a jolly ebullience for the jubilant grandeur of the original – will stay, though. Chilton's interviews with surviving members disclose that this was not how they saw it themselves. Like Fazola, several came from New Orleans, and knew at first hand what they were aiming to preserve. A further reason for Chilton's dedication is provided by the later reunion between Hank Lawson and Bob Haggart. Though saddled with an absurdly hubristic name, "The World's Greatest Jazz Band", they produced throughout the 1960s and 1970s modestly enjoyable music that continued to respect tradition, albeit by far than Bob

the despised saxophone in Humphrey Lyttelton's band, and was greeted at Birmingham Town Hall by a banner which read "Go Home Dirty Bopper". A self-taught musician of enormous imaginative gifts, he has courageously upheld his own banner of catholicity throughout the various sectarian squabbles. Improvisation for him is "the life-story bit", whether studying under the modernist Lee Konitz or playing with the jolly Acker Bilk band.

It is a weakness of *A History Of Jazz In Britain 1919-50* that the author neglects "Gerald's Navy", since so many British modernists got first-hand impressions of bebop in New York by signing on for the dance bands on the liners – surely a more significant event than the polarization of duffel-coats and crew-cuts at home. Turner made several trips across the Atlantic playing on board the Queen Mary, and was surprised to find that the legendary American jazz musicians were more interested in his ship than in explaining their musical revolution. Conditions on board are neatly recalled: no goatees, no berets and no dark glasses were permitted by order of the Gerald office, but chocolate was unrationed.

Neither book arrives at a satisfying overview. Both writers find no merit at all in the free-form playing of the 1970s, and reveal more of themselves than of the idiom. "God knows what George Robey would have made of it", writes Godbolt, while Turner writes that "at that moment I think I came dangerously near to dashing my saxophone against a wall and sobbing like a child". The illustrations are a mixed bunch. *Jazz In Britain* boasts a classic shot of Mrs Thatcher miming on clarinet with Chris Barber and Kenny Ball, but too many photographs of the legal profession which ruled upon Sidney Bechet's "illegal" performances in Britain in 1949. There is no shortage in either book of period pictures featuring aficionados with RAF haircuts and Pair Isle pullovers.

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BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS

John Grigg



## Between then and now

### Stanley Wells

ALAN C. DESSEN  
*Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters*  
190pp. Cambridge University Press. £17.50.  
0521 259126

ROBERT S. MIOLA  
*Shakespeare's Rome*  
244pp. Cambridge University Press. £19.50.  
0521 253971

J.C. GRAY (Editor)  
*Mirror up to Shakespeare: Essays in honour of G.R. Hibbard*  
315pp. University of Toronto Press. £29.75.  
08020 56393

E.A.J. HONIGMANN  
*Shakespeare's Impact on his Contemporaries*  
149pp. Macmillan. Paperback. £7.95.  
0333 269381

G. WILSON KNIGHT  
*Shakespearean Dimensions*  
232pp. Brighton: Harvester. £22.50.  
07108 06280

C.B. COX and D. J. PALMER (Editors)  
*Shakespeare's Wide and Universal Stage*  
233pp. Manchester University Press. £19.50.  
07190 10756

These books on Shakespeare are a mixture of old and new: two substantial, full-length studies based on original research; a volume of new scholarly and critical essays assembled as a tribute to a much admired scholar and teacher; a paperback reprint of a comparatively new study of Shakespeare as seen by his contemporaries; a collection of essays spanning nearly half a century by a senior critic; and an anthology of articles that have appeared over the past twenty-five years in *Critical Quarterly*. They exemplify a wide variety of approaches, but dominant among them are the historical and the theatrical.

Alan Dessen bases *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* on a detailed study of the early printings of the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline periods. Stage directions in the early printings of these plays are often inadequate. Some plays exist in more than one form; in some – such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* – the text lying closest to the author's manuscript is less informative about staging than other texts that more clearly represent theatrical practice. Editors tend to prefer the former; Dessen contends, very reasonably, that any evidence that "helps us to envisage the play as witnessed by its original audience" deserves prominence in modern editions. I have every sympathy with the point of view that "the editor's rigor in decisions about the prose and poetry is rarely matched by an equally careful treatment of stage directions," but Dessen goes too far in suggesting that all directions, whatever their authority, should be incorporated into the text itself. The full complexity of information about most Elizabethan plays requires detailed discussion, and calls for readers willing to cast their eyes from the text to a commentary if they are to be adequately informed.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of Dessen's study lies in his assembling of related stage directions from a number of plays which enable him to demonstrate the existence of conventional methods of suggesting what has been going on off stage (as when characters enter "as from dinner", "from hunting", "as from shipwreck", and so on) and of symbolizing a state of mind, such as distress or madness. The more detailed directions found in some plays certainly help to illuminate stage practices in other texts where the directions may be more laconic: *Enter Viola, a Captain, and Salvo* in all the Folio gives for the entrance of the shipwrecked Viola – far less informative than *Enter old Antonio, bringing in Ariadne, shipwrecked, the Clown turning the child up and down, and wringing the Clowns' 'Enter Redragon all wet, looking about for shelter as shipwrecked*. (From *The Tenth Muse*, an anonymous play of the 1590s).

Historical though Dessen's approach is, he is concerned too with modern stage practices. His book may be particularly valuable when the planned reconstructions of the first and second Globe come into being in London and Detroit, but directors working on modern stages might usefully ponder his remarks on, for example,

the use of stage lighting in scenes set in the dark but designed for performance in daylight. Dessen shows that a study of the original conditions of performance may be a useful preliminary not merely to an attempt to reconstruct these conditions, but also to their translation into the theatre language of a later age. The same applies to design: Dessen's emphasis on the fluidity of stage locale, on the essentially unlocalized nature of Elizabethan staging, is not merely antiquarian in its implications, but could be suggestive to designers even of highly picturesque productions.

I am less confident that some of Dessen's more interpretative critical conclusions are similarly translatable into stage terms. He has an often fascinating section on "seeing and not-seeing", providing a rich background for moments such as Macbeth's "seeing" of an invisible dagger and the appearance in the banquet scene of Banquo's ghost to Macbeth alone. This is presented partly as support for an interpretation of the invisibility of old Hamlet's ghost to Gertrude in the so-called "closest" scene. According to Dessen, Gertrude's blindness is "a major signal that should alert us to Hamlet's blindness to himself and to the full implications of his actions". I am not convinced that even an Elizabethan audience could have deduced this significance from the scene.

If at times Dessen seems to read too much into the evidence, his work is soundly based and presented with vigorous clarity; his experience of modern productions demonstrates his concern with the continuing stage life of the plays he discusses, and his intensive study of them in the larger context of the theatre of their time justifies his contention that we can "best understand a theatre other than our own by concentrating upon those moments that... cause us problems and therefore make us conscious of the gaps between then and now".

Robert S. Miola, in *Shakespeare's Rome*, is far more concerned with "then" than "now". Whereas most previous studies of Shakespeare's treatment of Roman history have confined themselves to the major classical tragedies, *Julius Caesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, perhaps with a nod towards – or a shudder away from – *Titus Andronicus*, Miola adds to these works the early narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* and the late romance *Cymbeline* for a more comprehensive investigation of the sources of Shakespeare's conception of Rome, his methods of portraying the city, his attitudes towards Roman values and his depiction of the struggles of the Roman people "with a city that demands them to be both more and less than human". Miola identifies among Shakespeare's major concerns the political motifs of invasion and rebellion along with the exploration of the Roman ideals of constancy, honour, and *pietas*. Troy, the city that gave birth to Rome, is a recurrent point of reference.

Miola's investigation of Shakespeare's "deep sources" draws attention to some interesting relationships with his earlier plays, and leads to a new emphasis on the importance to his imaginative vision of Virgil. There is a strong critical dimension to Miola's work; in, for example, his demonstration of the place of the classical myth of the four ages in *Titus Andronicus*, his comments on the roles of the women in *Julius Caesar* as figures whose "anguish conveys Shakespeare's increasingly critical conception of Rome and Roman values", and his relating of the work of Roman rhetoricians to *Coriolanus*. Consideration of the part played by Rome in *Cymbeline* provides an original perspective on the play, which Miola sees as, perhaps surprisingly, wholeheartedly pagan to the superiority of British over Roman values.

*Shakespeare's Rome* is a coherent, well-shaped, deeply pondered study which recognizes what is constant in Shakespeare's portrayal while also giving full value to the changes and developments in his artistry, and to the uniqueness of each individual work. A aspect of historical investigation it penetrates deeply behind the texts, but Miola is disappointingly patronizing in his conclusions about some of them, perhaps because he sees them too much as works of the literary past rather than the theatrical present.

Two of the Roman plays – *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus* – are studied at five of the essays in *Mirror up to Shakespeare*. This is a

mixed bag, as is the nature of such volumes. Some essays are slight, others of real but limited interest; but Kenneth Muir takes a wide focus in a brief but masterly placing of T.S. Eliot's criticism of Elizabethan drama in relation to Eliot's own development and the culture of his time. J.A.B. Somerset offers a salutary challenge to the orthodox view that Armin's succession to the place in the King's Men formerly occupied by Will Kemp influenced Shakespeare's portrayal of fools in his later plays, and S. P. Zitner investigates Shakespeare's staging of the occult in *J. Henry IV* with a refreshing concern for both the "then" and the "now" of the play's theatrical realization. G. K. Hunter somewhat haughtily dismisses the theory that an earlier printing of the eighteenth-century chapbook on *Titus Andronicus* was the source of Shakespeare's play as wishful thinking on the part of "most scholars", but proceeds to a discussion of the play's sources and effect which valuably complements Miola's.

E. A. J. Honigmann's *Shakespeare's Impact on his Contemporaries*, published in 1982 and now reissued in paperback, is a wholly historical study which does not eschew speculation. Our evidence about Shakespeare's life and career is so partial that it is as open to interpretation as his plays. The conventional view of his personality – that he was "sweet" and "gentle" – Honigmann regards as a costly sentimental over-simplification; what we know of Shakespeare's business transactions could imply that he was "a hard-headed businessman, perhaps a money-lender as well". It is usually supposed that Shakespeare was indifferent to the publication of his plays: Honigmann offers an alternative reading of the evidence here, too, proposing that Shakespeare may have requested the publication of good quartos to replace reported texts, and that he and his fellows may have made a policy of not allowing reprints of some plays (how, he does not say). Honigmann's challenge to the general (though not unanimous) view that Shakespeare was a late starter, and that his earliest plays date from about 1590, is healthy, but gets bogged down in an over-complex and inconclusive study of the relationship between *King John* and *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, thought by some scholars to be Shakespeare's source play, by others (including Honigmann) to be a derived text. Among

Honigmann's freer speculations are the revival of the notion that Jonson is the rival poet of the Sonnets, the suggestion that Thomas Thorpe's own dedication, and the theory that *The Winter's Tale* is a response to Jonson's criticisms of his artistry. This book is unlikely to establish a new orthodoxy, but it certainly should make us all think twice before repeating the commonplace of the old.

*Shakespearean Dimensions* brings together essays on Shakespeare and his contemporaries going back to the 1930s by a purely interpretative critic who nevertheless has, throughout his long career, been much involved in practical theatre; Wilson Knight is a remarkable verse speaker in a mode that has almost vanished and deserves to be recorded. Much of his most highly regarded criticism is unrelated to performance, but some of his more recent work draws on his experience as an actor, especially in *Timon of Athens*. He displays a continuing and fruitful preoccupation with this play, deriving partly from its concern with the polarities of material and spiritual values; partly from its peculiar openness to interpretation, as a work which appears to have been left unfinished; and partly from its concern with self-exposure, both emotional and physical. Wilson Knight continues to ride his old hobby-horse, and to be exasperatingly (if touchingly) self-referential, but at its best – as in the fine essay on *Timon of Athens* and Buddhism, dating from 1980 – his recent criticism still displays the capacity to relate particularities in a work of art to generalities of human experience that has made him a major figure in Shakespeare criticism.

*Critical Quarterly* is a journal that has succeeded in reaching out to a more than narrowly academic readership. *Shakespeare's Wide and Universal Stage*, which reprints sixteen essays from the twenty-five years of the journal's career, can be recommended to the intelligent lay reader in search of stimulation and guidance in his approach to Shakespeare. Some, however, should have noticed that the picture on the jacket is of the Beargarden, not the Globe, and that the production of *All's Well That Ends Well* sensitively analysed by R. L. (not R. J., as the table of contents has it) Smallwood was given by the Royal Shakespeare Company, not, as the jacket says, the National Theatre.

## The bits in italics

### David Daniell

ANN PASTERNAK SLATER  
*Shakespeare the Director*  
244pp. Brighton: Harvester. Paperback. £7.95.  
07108 09611

Shakespearean stage directions have tended to have a life of their own. Many can be shown to have a claim to be authorial, like "Holds her by the hand silent" in *Coriolanus* or, as Ann Pasternak Slater herself notes, the vivid actions of Cleopatra with the messenger. Many are not, and represent somebody's idea of how it ought to be. There is here a large difficulty for editors. The most recent tendency, shown for example in the newest volumes from Oxford and Cambridge, is towards restraint, and this is a relief after the embarrassing italic chatter of the earlier New Cambridge editions under Dover Wilson fifty years ago: "They stand behind a tree" and so on.

Ann Pasternak Slater therefore had a good idea, in writing a book, now in paperback, about what can be learned about Shakespeare's own manipulation of theatrical effects, as she puts it, using accepted authorial directions; business embedded in spoken text ("for look you, Brutus"); and more doubtfully business, apparently preserved in the actors' memories in *Bad Quartos*. She is able to work with some subtlety, and she can be brightly illuminating. Cassio in *Othello* kissing his fingers, and kissing Emilia, emerges as showing unattractive "libertine" topography. The attention given in the play to Cleopatra's hand, or the feet of Antony, is fitting on the ground, come, strikingly, across. She casts a keen light on what they moment in *King Lear* when Kent, bowing, the

terrified Fool by holding his hand". She has a gift for pointing out suggestively where "linguistic metaphor unfolds into stage symbol" across several plays. She can make a phrase with force, though I am not sure about calling *Bad Quartos* "a raffish ace witness". Her notes include a useful guide to the rise and sideways move of the iconographic study of Shakespeare. She will help the intelligent general reader and lover of Shakespeare to see moments in his plays with eyes less distracted by the dominance of late twentieth-century electronic visuals.

This is not to say that the book is without faults. The bones of what I assume to have been an academic thesis show through too easily. The headings under which items are treated often seem wayward. Though she refers to Shakespeare's "multiplicity which defies categorisation", there is through the book the irritating assumption that the earlier plays of Shakespeare are always inferior rather than different. Her impressionistic strokes too easily become cheerful caricatures. "Epitaphs in the first history trilogy" will not do: there are precisely two (more only if Cade's brief mockery is counted and you include, as she does, the very different creation of two Dukes and an Earl). The Master Guttering in *Henry VI* most specifically does not go on to "lunch". How can the hauling up of the dying Antony to the "gallery" be called "unobtrusive"? And so on.

This book stays within conventions, in several senses: Yet there is inside it something which will come to mind when more conventionally correct books do not. I hope she will return to Shakespeare, and particularly to *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, plays about which even on the brief evidence of this book she has something of importance to say.

## The well-turned story

### Brian Morton

ANNE TYLER and SHANNON RAVENEL (Editors)  
*The Year's Best American Short Stories*  
310pp. Severn House. £7.95.  
0728 1043 X  
DOUGLAS MESSERLI (Editor)  
*Contemporary American Fiction*  
338pp. Sun and Moon Press. \$14.95.  
094050223

*The Year's Best American Short Stories* has a well-respected pedigree, and Anne Tyler's predecessors in the guest editor's chair include Ted Solotaroff, Joyce Carol Oates, Stanley Elkin, Hortense Calisher and John Gardner. Eight out of the twenty stories are reprinted from *The New Yorker*, others from *Playboy*, *Ploughshares* and the big literary quarterlies. These are all well-made stories whose attraction lies, as Anne Tyler admits, in their having, each one, an internal moment of stillness – not necessarily a dramatic epiphany but a well-crafted turn.

Despite that, some – most noticeably those from the recognized novelists – give the impression of journeywork or of being exiled from something larger. Ursula Le Guin, who merits two stories, has one hit with "The Professor's House" (which only sounds like Willa Cather; in fact it is a lot more chilling) and one miss of such proportions ("Sur: A Summary Report of the Yelcho Expedition to the Antarctic, 1909–10") that one wonders why it's there. John Updike's "Deaths of Distant Friends" reads like a fragment from a novel; it recounts the death of an old golfing chum but with that urge to generalize and universalize that often overtakes Updike in his short fiction, only rarely in his novels. Larry Woiwode's "Firstborn" is a boiled-down Larry Woiwode novel, almost unbearably charged with emotion and yet ultimately rather abstract and enigmatic. Guy Vanderhaeghe's "Reunion" and Raymond Carver's "Where I'm Calling From" both give the sense of belonging purely to the genre. Vanderhaeghe in particular creates something genuinely haunting

out of the thinnest and least promising of domestic materials.

The collection hardly merits, however, Tyler's enthusiastic insistence that it consists of "spendthrift" works, outpourings by writers not content to hoard ideas for the big novel or to rate the short story as a second rank enterprise. With the exception of Carver, Vanderhaeghe and a new talent, Diane Vreuls, that is precisely the impression they create.

Given its wider and more experimental brief, *Contemporary American Fiction*, edited by Douglas Messerli, could hardly fail to be more various. There's a more obvious plundering of the genre here, with mock folk-tale, pictures, pages from a cookbook, typographical tricks. Not being constrained to the short story as strictly conceived, Messerli includes chapters from longer works. Toby Olson's "The Game" from *Seaview* features a manic allegory set on a miniature golf course, Melvyn Freilicher's "The Textbook" is a disjointed scuttle through American literary history ("Nathaniel West Hawthorne", Jack Kerouac, Emily Dickinson) from his *Genre Studies*, a title that would do well for the whole volume.

As with *The Year's Best*... there is some feeling of displacement. Roberta Allen is best known as a visual artist, and her page-and-a-half "Gypsies" and "A Real Act" seem rather out of context. John Ashbery's "Description of a Masque" never really rises above its title and might have been better left in his notes for a sharper, more incisive poem. Walter Abish's "Alphabet of Revelations" does little more than dust down the rigid matrix of his novel *Alphabetical Africa* and put it to use with the mildest of plots. The device itself – Arlo, Bud, Clem, Donna, Erna – collapses as soon as it's spotted. Gilbert Sorrentino, another who shifts between poetry, short and longer fiction, revives in "The Gala Cocktail Party" the listing de and the sub-Joyce, sub-Flann O'Brien orgy of puns, allusions and heavily accented dialogue that made *Mulligan Stew* so irritating. The one unquestioned star turn is Steve Katz's "The Keeper", a haunting piece of Gothic with an unforgettable story within a story.

## Embracing Everywriter

### Mark Casserley

PETER ACKROYD (Editor)  
*PEN New Fiction I*  
234pp. Quartet. £8.95.  
07043 24539

The majority of the twenty-nine stories in this anthology (published with assistance from the Arts Council) are by new writers. The editor, Peter Ackroyd, has not imposed an aesthetic uniformity; this is a report on the current state of Everywriter.

Among the general characteristics discernible is a response to the conditions of the time. John Greening's "Pleasure Trips" offers a perceptive and sympathetic narrative of the confused state of a Vietnamese exile struggling to understand the culture of a Scottish fishing community; Ben Okri's "Disparities" is a commentary by a homeless and disaffected outsider on the life of London, while "Visit", by Mark Harding, shows working people struggling to make ends meet in modern Britain. These stories, however, are very different from each other in every way; and, while J. New's "Crowning Demon", whose narrator is returning home after working late in these "unbearable times", presents a bleak contemporary landscape, it is only the prelude to a juxtaposition of his consciousness with that of Christopher Smart in *Tubalite Agno*.

The collection embraces a wide diversity of contemporary subject-matter: stories of India and Africa and of ethnic minorities in Britain; Irish stories, stories of adolescence and sexual development; gay stories, stories based on altered states of mind, and conceits in prose. But not many of them are adequately circumscribed by such classifications: homosexuality is important in Desmond Hogan's "Ties", for example, but it has almost nothing else in common with "Confession of a Catamite", by Brian Allan.

Most of the stories are most deeply concerned

## Criminal proceedings

### T. J. Binyon

SARA PARETSKY  
*Deadlock*  
252pp. Gollancz. £8.50.  
0575 034106

*Deadlock* is Sara Paretsky's second novel about V. I. Warshawski, a female private detective working in Chicago. When her cousin, former hockey star Boom Boom Warshawski, falls from one of the Eudora Grain Company wharves into the waters of Lake Michigan and drowns, she, as his executor, begins to wind up his affairs, and gradually comes to believe that his death was no accident. Further investigation uncovers more worms and becomes more than a trifle dangerous. Good story, well told, with good background, good characters, and good business detail; but Warshawski herself is just a little bit too good to be true. "Why should you succeed where the FBI, the US Coast Guard and the Army Corps of Engineers have failed?" pertinently inquires the Lloyds' representative.

HOWARD ENGEL  
*The Suicide Murders*  
200pp. Gollancz. £7.95.  
0575 034726

Third case for Benny Cooperman, the Jewish Canadian private eye who lives and works in Grantham, an up-and-coming town on the Niagara's peninsula. And the question he has to answer is: why are so many prominent citizens handing in their chips voluntarily when their stake in a big new property development is promising to pay off in a very big way indeed? Neat and unassuming, like Benny himself, with pleasing touches of comedy.

GERALD HAMMOND  
*Sauce for the Pigeon*  
192pp. Macmillan. £6.95.  
0333 365453

Newton Lauder gunsmith Keith Calder is usually at odds with the local police, but this time they call on him for expert advice when a game-bag containing two dozen woodpigeons is discovered near a burnt-out Land Rover with a body inside. But, as usual, the law gets hold of the wrong end of the stick, and Calder has to clear the affair up. Gerald Hammond's latest Newton Lauder narrative keeps up the high standard of previous episodes: a well-machined story, told in civilized fashion, and adorned with a good deal of useful information on pigeon-shooting.

MICHAEL INNES  
*Carson's Conspiracy*  
183pp. Gollancz. £6.95.  
0575 034475

Carson is a shady entrepreneur whose business is on the rocks; the aim of his conspiracy is to realize his assets and make a surreptitious departure for South America, leaving behind a

number of debts and a dotty wife. As Carson's neighbour and sometime dinner guest, Sir John Appleby, the former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, has a ringside view of developments, but early declares his intention of playing the role of a Mycroft, rather than a Sherlock in the affair. Perhaps a little thin on incident, but as polished, urbane and amusing as ever.

DESMOND BAGLEY  
*Night of Error*  
314pp. Collins. £8.95.  
0002227924

Oceanographer Mike Trevelyan's brother Mark – the black sheep of the family – dies on a remote Pacific island, leaving behind the clue to an immense treasure in mineral deposits on the sea bed. Financed by an American millionaire, and with a merry band of ex-commandos as crew, Mike sets off in search of wealth. Naturally he finds himself having to contend not only with wind and wave, but also with as nasty a gang of crooks as one might hope to meet between the pages. Desmond Bagley, who died last April, wrote *Night of Error* in 1962, but never finally revised it; his notes, however, have been incorporated into this version. It's certainly genuine Bagley, with a fast-moving narrative, good action and clever use of technical detail, but it isn't, all the same, Bagley at his best.

SUSAN MOODY  
*Penny Black*  
224pp. Macmillan. £7.50.  
0333 365321

Penny Wanawake is a cross between Shaft and Modesty Blaise. She is black, beautiful and six feet tall. She has a pad in Chelsea and another in Monterey. She is also the partner of Barnaby Midas, antique dealer, art thief and conman. And when a friend of hers is slashed to death in the ladies' washroom at Los Angeles airport, she sets out to track down the killer. Susan Moody, in her first novel, has undoubtedly created a character who will run and run; and she demonstrates, too, a good ear for smart dialogue. But the story's far too flimsy to support Penny's lithe and muscular 126 pounds.

LAWRENCE BLOCK  
*The Topless Tulip Carer*  
186pp. Allison and Busby. £7.95.  
085031 5727

Tulip Willing, a topless dancer in a New York bar, calls in Leo Haig, self-billed as the world's second greatest detective (the greatest is of course Nero Wolfe), to find out who has poisoned two hundred of her tropical fish. As a tropical fish buff himself, Haig is only too pleased to help, and gets his sassy young assistant, Chip Harrison, as adept at pitching the woo as Archie Goodwin himself, to begin inquiries. Amusing, pleasantly witty pastiche, chiefly of Rex Stout, but with occasional references to other classics of the genre.

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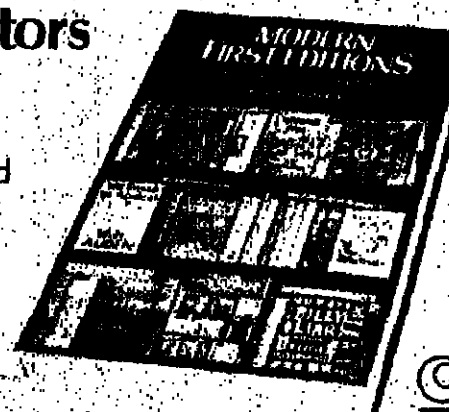
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## Surrealist signatures

### Nicholas Rankin

**JULIO CORTÁZAR**  
*A Change of Light* and other stories  
 Translated by Gregory Rabassa  
 275pp. Harvill. £8.95.  
 0002711109

It is night, and something strange is happening to Severo. Family and friends watch him sweat, leap about the room, or allot them random numbers. Is he dying? "One after another the moths abandoned the lantern and flew around Severo, clinging to his hair, his mouth and his forehead until they had transformed him into an enormous trembling mask in which only the eyes were his." This picturesque image comes in the story "Severo's Phases".

Its author, the Argentine Julio Cortázar, died earlier this year in France, the spiritual home of Surrealism. He had spent the first half of his life in Argentina before France drew him in 1951. Of his four published novels, the experimental *Hopscotch* (1963) was the best-known: a Beat epic, a *Ulysses* with *maté* that moves between Paris and Buenos Aires. Cortázar also wrote several books of poems and essays, and eleven collections of distinctive short stories.

Argentina has, of course, its own modern tradition of fantastic fictions to which both Borges and Cortázar belong. The uncanny may have its native roots in the country's maddeningly open spaces and grotesque history, but it is also a refraction of other literatures. Argentines are "a race of full-time readers", observed Cortázar, who translated Poe, read Jarry, and later made Surrealism accessible through his work. He is not naïve: what looks like "automatic writing" is in fact clever and careful use of stream-of-consciousness narration. He uses surreal tricks to subvert a conventional-looking story. Cortázar wanted to liberate the "monsters" of the psyche: he was intrigued by the Surrealists' way, between aesthetic, personal and political transformation.

*A Change of Light* is not a new collection, as claimed, since some of the eighteen stories appeared ten years ago in Spanish, and the American edition of Gregory Rabassa's fluent translations came out in 1980. But the stories do indicate Cortázar's range of subject-matter and form. They also point up some persistent motifs: floating hands, painting, vampires, women as furry animals, sex and death, and the Paris *métro* as a prime location for Surrealist

games of *hasard objectif*, in which chance is subject to will and desire.

There are conventionally plotted stories with a Maupassant-like twist at the end ("A Change of Light", "Trade Winds"); there are fragmentary New Wave thrillers in which motive and action are not explained ("Someone Walking Around", "Butterball's Night"). And there are very literary stories, such as "Footsteps in the Footprints", which has overtones of *The Aspern Papers* but with an Argentine setting.

It was Borges who first published a Cortázar short story, in a magazine he was editing in 1946. They shared a distaste for Perón's first regime, but their subsequent development was very different. Cortázar visited Cuba, spoke up for the tortured and exiled of the 1970s. In 1978 the volume containing two particular stories included in *A Change of Light* was banned by the military government of Argentina.

One of these stories, "Second Time Around", could be read simply as a description of some people waiting their turn for "the procedure" outside shabby government offices where unnamed bureaucrats sit drinking coffee. But the reader who works at certain cracks in the story will uncover the message that affronted the *Junta*. Cortázar is writing of the State-sanctioned "disappearance" of citizens, a standard Argentine "procedure" of that epoch.

"Apocalypse at Solentiname", written in 1976, is not so disguised. It reads as autobiography, describing one of Cortázar's real-life visits to Nicaragua. Afterwards, back in Paris, the author sits down to watch the innocent slides he took. Instead, atrocious images explode from the screen: kidnapping, shooting, torture, the death of a poet, bombs. When his girlfriend looks, she sees only transparencies of naïve paintings by Nicaraguan peasants: "They came out so well, that one with the smiling fish and the mother with the two children and the cows in the field . . . tell me who painted them, you couldn't see the signatures."

"Apocalypse at Solentiname" is about much more than ways of seeing. Cortázar was a brave man who ran literary risks and took political sides. He was born in German-occupied Brussels in August 1914 and his last book before his death was about contemporary Nicaragua, now familiar with the fear of invasion. Cortázar was probably the best known and most interesting modern Argentine writer after Borges; he was also a loyal heir to the hopes of the early Surrealists for a heroic alliance between art and history.

## Voices off

### A. J. Fitzgerald

**GABRIEL JOSIPOVICI**  
*Conversations in Another Room*  
 121pp. Methuen. £7.95.  
 0413559300

In a flat in West London (topography plays no great part, and certainly not its usual one, in Gabriel Josipovici's novella, but it is far from irrelevant: the place-names have their weight) sits Phoebe, advanced in years, more or less bedridden, conversing now with her young niece, who visits her at the same time every Saturday morning, now with her companion Mary, of indeterminate age but most probably somewhere between the other two. The conversations, or at least the voices of the women, are overheard (and, as it may be, transcribed, or invented) by the niece's friend Mike, who waits, scribbling in a notebook, biting his lower lip, tugging at his hair, in the hall. The old lady is stubborn, testy, malicious, afraid; the niece cheerful, indulgent, attractive, disingenuous; Mary stoical, unflustered, self-possessed. Or are they?

The comedy of their exchanges is fastidious and exact, having to do with an extremely accurate (though not mimetic) sense of timing, of the pauses, hesitations, evasions and sudden forward leaps, the artful, purposeful inconsequentiality of talk among intimates who have something to hide or something to discover, something important, that is, invested in their own words and the words of others. Skirting grim, familiar ironies, the talk is now easy, bantering, now strained, locked in struggle.

That struggle is centred on Phoebe's suspicions apropos her two interlocutors (Mike remains apart from the charged verbal activity, or from direct participation in it). There is talk of a husband and a son who have both abandoned Phoebe, the former for a (putative) adultery in Italy, the latter – wrecking his own marriage in the process – similarly for an affair and, now, the infinite remoteness of the Middle East. There are questions of ownership, terms of employment, conditions of occupation. Phoebe plays Mary (whom she suspects in connection with her husband, or pretends to) off against her niece (ditto with the son). Josipovici is adept at the old lady's high-toned fearfulness, her preoccupation with death, her sly tyranny; the touch is light, the *pois* *du non-dit* considerable. There is a moment of genuine shock when truant husband Robert is revealed to us in Positano – his thoughts tending towards not Mary but Sally, the niece.

All of this is economically and absorbingly done. The stylized surface propriety and consistency of the exchanges, their gravely comic rituals of interrogation, repetition and contradiction, have something in common with the dialogues Muriel Spark has been orchestrating in a series of dazzling short novels since the late 1960s: the undertones of fear, suspicion and

genteel sadism recall, faintly, Harold Pinter. The conversations contain some of the sharpest and funniest writing Josipovici has done since his early novels *Words* and *The Inventory*. It will not be surprising, though, to readers of his fiction, his books of criticism or his unshowy, penetrating reviews that he is not content to leave it at that – at the satisfactions of form offered by his technique of withholding other satisfactions, at the shaping of speech patterns, and an implied anecdote of caricatural ordinariness, into a verbal sparring-match. With the intrusion, towards the end, of a first-person narrative voice ("And now at last I can speak") comes the – not entirely unexpected – turning back of dexterity on itself; anxious doubts take over, about the status of the ladies' slim and resonant sentences, about the conscious desires and hidden drives of their creator, about the ways of the self, at once intrusive and painfully self-conscious, in the ontological maze of fiction; finally and more hauntingly about loss, emptiness, failure, "the dust-heap of the imagination". These reflections are not without urgency, but there hovers too a whiff of over-conscious despair.

We grow accustomed to the unpredictability of the dialogues (notwithstanding the immense importance of routine and repetition in the household), to a sleight of tense and mood by which a given exchange can slip with no announcement of a forward or backward movement in time, into another, different "moment" in the ongoing conversation, giving each section the feel of something both specific and paradigmatic. When this is carried over into the artist's self-scrutiny, dissolving boundaries between the protagonists or between their inventions and his, blurring times and places, taking the anecdotal ground – shifting at the best of times – from under our feet ("perhaps there was no husband, no son, no Rome, no Amalfi, no air-conditioned flat in the Gulf. Perhaps there are only two old ladies slowly dying together in a cramped flat in West London"), the new paradigm, of fiction as a holding operation, as a succession of more or less improvisatory measures to keep off emptiness and dread, the gestures in this instance being spun out of silent, internal chatter, the murmuring of innumerable voices in the mind – all this comes a little too pat; the authorial throwing in and up of hands risks looking less like an inevitable end than a way out.

Josipovici, though, like his closest mentor among modernist writers, Robbe-Grillet, turns the knife again. The final short chapter comes back to the original anecdote, the unstoppable cycle, and an endlessly receding perspective which he cuts off, not with a flurry of self-doubt but a poised and beautiful tableau of terror and flight: the intent gaze, the moment of arrest and powerfully suggestive depiction releasing the trapped undercurrents of feeling and fascination that have given rise to the book.

## Fascists in the bed

### Robin Buss

**AGUSTIN GOMEZ ARCOS**  
*Un Oiseau brulé vif*  
 227pp. Paris: Seuil. 75fr.

Agustín Gómez-Arcos started his career as a playwright, in Spain, but moved to France in 1966 for reasons that may be evident to the reader of *Un Oiseau brulé vif*: the portrait of the right-wing mentality in the last days of the Franco régime is diverting, but only from a safe distance.

Paula Pinzon Martin, his central character, is the daughter of Brigadier Abel Pinzon, whom she despises for his failure to take advantage of being on the winning side. She is an unthinking Fascist who celebrates her "victory" in the Civil War by the petty tyranny she exercises over her Republican maid, La Rouge. La Rouge is a constant reminder of the responsibilities of victory, "un fardeau . . . je dois la nourrir, la loger et la payer, cette vaincue, comme s'il ne me suffisait pas de l'avoir, comme si elle n'était que mon jouet". If their relationship is an obvious allegory for the political tensions outside Paula's claustrophobic household, the two women's personalities are still interesting

though more than a little grotesque. In particular, their sexual preferences. "Plus elle y réfléchissait, mieux elle se rendait compte à quel point les changements politiques peuvent avoir une incidence sur la vie privée des individus." Paula is thinking of the death of Franco, but the extension of political attitudes into personal ones is an assumption of this kind of satire. In the event, it is not especially kind to either side. La Rouge's wartime career as a Republican camp-follower may suggest a generous nature, but it leaves her ravaged by the effects of a syphilitic condition which can no doubt be read also in symbolic terms. As for Paula, guided by her priest, she manages to achieve satisfaction while preserving her virginity (in a technical sense) through a long engagement. Anyone who is interested in how she does this may refer to the novel. Gómez-Arcos, like Moravia, believes that Fascists are Fascists, in bed as elsewhere, and seems to enjoy telling you why.

The story takes in the death of Franco, the advent of Juan Carlos and the failed coup of 1981. Even for those not directly concerned by them, the politics give an edge to the human and, if this savage view of the country is not all of Spain, Gómez-Arcos probably has a gift

## Myriads and miniatures

### Lachlan Mackinnon

**FRANK KUPPNER**  
*A Bad Day for the Sung Dynasty*  
 144pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £4.95.  
 083635143

**HERBERT LOMAS**  
*From the Garden*  
 64pp. Oxford University Press. £4.50.  
 0 19 21960 5

**A. C. LEALE**  
*Levinthal and other poems*  
 72pp. Allison and Busby. £3.95.  
 083015794

Frank Kuppner's China is an immense space unchanged through great tracts of time, where history is comically remote from the myriads of important people on whose lives the poet mainly focuses. His title, *A Bad Day for the Sung Dynasty*, brings together the contingent and the impersonally extensive in characteristic fashion. Five hundred and one independent quatrains, with ten more to analyse the form, based on "seven big red volumes" of Chinese paintings, make up a kaleidoscope of scene and mood, as for example:

As incense powder has fallen during the night;  
 All has been covered in black, even the river;  
 How many cities have the rebels burned by now,  
 The woodsmen wonder, wiping their wives clean.  
 The clumsiness of "wiping" enacts the clumsiness of accidental perception: if there is delicacy or tenderness in the movement, we cannot see it.

Sometimes it is not at all clear what emotional note is being hit:

So this a river it can hardly hold the three boats;  
 A child, alone on the skiff not far from the bank,  
 Awakened draws a piece of cloth through the water.

Wondering when either parent is going to reassure.  
 We cannot be sure that the child's apathy is as inappropriate as it seems, and do not therefore know whether to laugh or weep. Where, however, James Fenton's "Chosen" presented Korea as random alienness, shifting its details into an order which prevents our establishing clear relations, Kuppner's aim is less estranging than at first appears.

Sometimes, indeed, the oddity seems merely worked up. At several points Kuppner repeats

a quatrain with small variations, perhaps of only one word. This establishes the power of particulars to redefine their contexts, and may remind us of the minute suggestiveness of Chinese poetry, but the point need not be made more than once. Elegant demonstration turns into self-indulgence. The poet's tone can be almost ingratiating in its desire to domesticate the foreign and to bind it to us with humour and sentimentality. The same problem besets the aphorisms which punctuate the text. "It is more or less impossible to invent flight near pagodas" is properly undercut by doubt and therefore startling and authoritative, but when an enigma is replied to with "Of course, there's an obvious answer, but it's not the right one" we feel cheated by a too familiar thought.

The best poems are at once funny and wistful:

The game has now reached an exciting stage;  
 Both of the players are standing on their chairs;  
 Screaming out insults about each other's mother;  
 It looks as if a conclusion is within sight.

It is sad not to understand, but that sadness may be a sentimental twinge.

The stream straggles over the sandy ground;  
 The army trudges towards its destination;  
 A bird feeds its young in the shelter of some grass;  
 The wind blows a mass of fruit rinds towards the river.

This pretends simply to present, but the third line solicits more feeling than it earns. The last line is evocative but ("a mass") sketchy, and too many of the poems suffer from something similar. Serious feeling and acute lyricism often lie just beyond the sequence's range: that said, there is much in this book to entertain and stimulate.

In "Le Cimetière marin", Paul Valéry addresses the light: "Je te rends pure à ta place première: / Regarde-toi!" The intimacy of the familiar form gives a contemplative hush which Herbert Lomas translates thus: "I'll put you back / Intact on your primal proper site. / Just look at yourself! Just listen to yourself, the reader mutters. 'Fastidious as I am', Lomas says incautiously in "With the Pike Behind Her", "I bend to kiss / Her damp forehead." The queasiness here is exactly wrong, telling us about the poet and not the old woman who is his subject. In the past, he remembers her "Making me feel needed without trying". Effortless feeling, feelingless verse. The last

## Bidding for power

### Michael O'Neill

**JANE COOPER**  
*Scaffolding: New and selected poems.*  
 127pp. Avon Press. £4.95.  
 055661067

**MEDBH MCCUCKIAN**  
*Venus and the Rain*  
 95pp. Oxford University Press. £4.50.  
 0 19 21962 1

Both of these volumes challenge and fascinate; both contain memorably resonant poems. Yet the two poets could hardly be less alike. Jane Cooper's poetic voice remains powerful and held throughout the changes of style one can trace in *Scaffolding*, a selection of poems from a writing career that spans over thirty years. Medbh McCuckian's is even more inventive and obscure in *Venus and the Rain* than in *The Flower Master*, her first collection. Whatever the line she uses Cooper respects its integrity; McCuckian frequently delights in reckless enjambement; Cooper's imagery is spare and accessible; McCuckian's is lavishly decorative, close to a private code. Cooper strives, with very quiet, highly charged language, to bind together the political and the personal; McCuckian's imagination is fantastical, self-delighting. "What poetry must do is alert us to a truth, and it must be necessary", Cooper writes in the illuminating essay at the centre of her book. Teasingly reflexive, McCuckian announces in "Prio-Dieu": "Yet / This oblique language is my natural / Way of speaking".

The two writers share at least one theme: the complexities of relationships between men and women, what in "The Graveyard" Jane Cooper calls "different ways of being human".

Cooper thought of her first (unpublished) collection as "war poems from a civilian's, a woman's, point of view", yet her most authentic early poems ("Eve", "The Door", "Twins" and "Obligations") address personal concerns. "Twins" is a lacerating, ultimately self-lacerating account of a relationship: "You ask for love but what you want is healing, / Selfishly, understandably". But the poet's emotional difficulties are always so angled that they point towards wider cultural problems. Cooper's development as a poet is bound up with her growing ability to invest particular experience with larger, often unspoken meaning. "The Faithful", for instance, her most searching poem about being a "nonpartisan" in war, is, primarily, an elegy; the poet pant" in war, is, primarily, an elegy; the poet haunted in the pre-dawn darkness by "A shape dissolving and flitting". War enters in the third stanza, where the poet refers with sombre wit to the "no man's land / Of sheet" to her left. "The Faithful" does more than express grief; though in the last stanza, the poet – often at her best when hardest on herself – remorselessly phases judgment on her "blameless life".

Cooper's finest poems bear out the truth of a passage from an essay by Adrienne Rich: "Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman".

No true political poetry can be written with propaganda as an aim, to persuade persons 'out there' of some atrocity or injustice. . . . As poetry, it can come only from the poet's need to identify her relationship to atrocities and injustices, the sources of her pain, fear, and anger, the meaning of her resistance.

"Threads", a long poem in which Cooper takes on the persona of Rosa Luxemburg, succeeds in avoiding "propaganda". With tact and skill, the poem creates a composite voice; sympathy, the poem creates a composite voice; poet and subject can both be heard. The urge

stanza of this poem aims at a symbolist resonance:

And all the time we're talking, outside a window  
 Some children and a dog or two  
 Are laughing, barking, with a bouncing ball  
 In a sunny park, in a bubble of light, all  
 Hanging like a bathysphere in the dark blue.

If the rest had not been so prosily discursive this might have come off, but as it is it feels tacked on, a gesture towards a different and better poem.

Lomas sometimes gives himself up to an extended simile:

Horses have a sense of humour, but these cows  
 Do not. Their slow gait has the float of hopelessness.  
 One hoist from the field like an old-age pensioner  
 Who's just remembered the loo and plods slowly  
 motion.

The collocation of loo and gas chamber is unfortunate, as the only possible connection is facetious. What has lost its meaning? We are never told because we are not shown where the cow is going.

Lomas pastoral is, though, preferable to Lomas political. "Roses are Blooming in Picardy":

The Sudanese grips his enemy's balls,  
 Shrills victory, spits on his paramour's prick,  
 And slashes the scrotum, which, conscious, quick,  
 Ejaculates in death, as a hanged man falls;  
 The victor's semen spurts on the softening genitals.

"As a hanged man falls" presumably means "as a hanged man ejaculates": a conscious scrotum (talking balls?) is something of a novelty. The poet declares his own fastidiousness. He tells us at the end of the first poem, "St Martin-in-the-Fields", that "A broad white shell of completeness / Has widened and cracked: / I'm open to sweetness." I found both claims very hard to believe.

B. C. Leale's spiky miniatures can also suffer from over-explicitness. In "Woman Alone", the last stanza is striking:

There are still the shimmering fictions  
 of required love  
 her hands clasping the shape of a cup  
 for the warmth of hands.

The work is done by the last two lines. The pity is that the first two reflect the vacuity of the preceding stanza:

The afternoon is not yet  
 when a white dog will sit with her  
 in the silence of the untracked white sand  
 facing the effaced sea.

to celebrate, strong in Jane Cooper's recent work, finds moving and vital expression in this ambitious poem: "Thus passing out of my cell in all directions / are fine threads connecting me / with thousands of birds and beasts".

Medbh McCuckian is sometimes described as an "erotic" poet. Certainly her favourite properties – rain, sun, moon, the seasons – are rich in symbolic potential. Yet, in *Venus and the Rain*, she is more compelling as a poet of psychological stresses and pressures. McCuckian writes well, for instance, about antagonisms and doublings within the self, as in "Isba Song" or "The Rising Out" which starts: "My dream sister has gone into my blood / To kill the poet in me before Easter". A security at which she freys and a freedom she views warily are the opposed points round which other poems spin their verbal webs. In "Venus and the Sun", a quirky monologuing voice charts a series of manoeuvres and recognitions, until, almost wearily, the speaker (Venus) concludes: "with any choice / I'd double-back to the duldest blue of Mars". Elsewhere, the tensions are more overt. "Catching Geese" begins: "Dreaming is after I decline to sleep / With you". Through the poem's subsequent mists of invention, it's possible to glimpse the outline of a recognizably human conflict: "You're unhappy / At my form-flated handshake, I'm unhappy / That my fresh hunger doesn't block your throat / Like a punger". McCuckian's tone is brazenly unsentimental, yet shouldn't be mistaken for indifference to pain. When the poem ends, "And every sound of you crying could be heard", it catches the reader off balance. Artifice and distress are suddenly brought into disturbing connection. More often, though, her poems seem riddling, blurred or opaque, games played by a sensibility delighting in the gap between words

This is an impression of old age, and "effaced" tactfully reminds us of the sea's symbolic resonance, but it is too generalized and stale to affect us.

The emotions Leale treats are as varied as one would expect – this is a gathering of many years' work. He can be facile, as in "Alberto Giacometti" (an appropriate subject), where sustained volcanic imagery, as of the artist's "strata- / shattering lava", is not quite clinched by the final "thin / human clinkers lean / furnace-raw". At his best, though, he can make his tiny forms sing, as in the clerihew "The Whale":

The whale  
 is not quite of the same ilk as the snail –  
 when a thrush taps it against the side of a ship  
 salty and glorious songs flow out over its lip.

The way the poem's whole release is left to the outpouring last line is masterly.

But these poems are only miniatures. A great many are concerned with artists – Soutine and Constable, for instance – and draw too much of their life from what we already know. "A Photograph Thought to Be of Branwell Brontë" is a marvellous title, but:

Perched on the church wall  
 elegant mauled bird  
 in a coat of jet pitted.

A foot's jauntily set  
 on the edge of a grave defusing it.

The inversion in the first stanza and the fussy lineation of the second are disturbing, but more so is the brevity. We must know the story of the failed brother to be moved at all, and the "mauled bird" makes too direct and sentimental an appeal to us.

In "A Café in Barcelona" Leale tells us that

A poet sits at a table  
 where a great verbal fabric's unfinished  
 where the lines are into weathered silence.

This may remind us of Wordsworth's description of the *Prelude* as an ante-chapel, and of his minor works as "little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses". Wordsworth's poems, though, were related to a central unfinished literary text: where Leale's are related to the world. Taking the day-to-day as his text, Leale provides us with marginalia, too often merely marginal. What we miss is precisely the "great verbal fabric" which could not be mistaken for how things usually are and would flesh out a private vision.

and things. Human qualities are cavalierly and knowingly assigned to "natural" phenomena. The risk of sounding coyly self-regarding isn't one she always avoids, as when she refers to "the art of raining, with its oh-so masculine / Kisses". At her best, metaphors and expertise fuse, forming new realities; the visionary opening of "Sabbath Park" is an intriguing example. *Venus and the Rain* is a gifted collection, yet it leaves the reader hoping that at some stage in this talented poet's career language will serve less as a screen and more as a torch.

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